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THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

B.6

IN

CAMBRIDGE.

Professor H: Ware D.D.,
with the best respects
of the author.

August 25. 1835
Salem

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ESSAY

ON THE

DOCTRINE OF DIVINE INFLUENCE

UPON

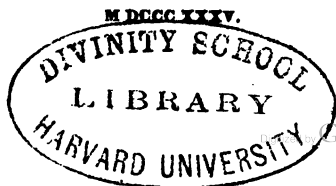
THE HUMAN SOUL.

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TO
AARON BANCROFT, S. T. D., A. A. S.,
OF WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS,
THE EARLY AND REVERED PASTOR,
AND
CONSTANT AND VALUED FRIEND OF
THE AUTHOR,
THIS ESSAY
IS RESPECTFULLY AND GRATEFULLY
INSCRIBED.

PREFATORY NOTICE.

THIS Essay was originally published in the xxxvith, and in two successive numbers, of the New Series of the Christian Examiner. At the suggestion of several persons, in whose judgment the author has confidence, and in the hope that the objects, for which the Essay was written, may be more fully accomplished, it has been revised, and is now republished in this form.

Salem, August, 1835.

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ESSAY.

CHAPTER I.

Introductory Remarks.

By the term, Divine or Spiritual Influence, as it is used in this Essay, we would be understood to mean the agency of God, or, if the terms are preferred, the spirit of God, or the holy spirit, operating upon the souls of men, by which they are illumined, disciplined, and improved ; all that support which God affords in temptation, trial, and sorrow ; in a word, all that spiritual aid, which He imparts to man, for the moral and religious advancement of his character here in this world, and by which he is prepared for a higher state of being in the world which is to come.

The subject is one of transcendent interest. It involves inquiries like these : whether, in our conscious weakness, we may look for strength to One who is mighty and willing to help ; whether, amidst perplexing circumstances and conflicting claims, we may seek direction from an unerring Guide, and an almighty Friend ; whether, when our spirits are sinking within us

under the burdens of our lot, we may refresh them at the Fountain of all life and consolation; whether, when they are stricken with a sense of guilt and fear, we may yet seek a Comforter who will lead us to God's mercy-seat; whether, in fine, when they are bewildered and lost in their own dark and wayward imaginings, we may look to One who is "greater than our hearts," and who will dispel our darkness by His own ineffable light.

It is obvious, however, that the subject is one, which, from its very nature, is peculiarly liable to misapprehension and abuse. That mystical spirit, which always, in a greater or less degree, pervades imaginative and enthusiastic minds; and which, in a world of sense, imperfection, and sin, leads them to seek an unearthly abstraction from present objects, and an impossible approach to God; will easily find in the Christian doctrine of Divine Influence upon the soul, the elements of a perverse nurture and unhealthy growth. Such has always been the fact. This spirit, which was by no means unknown to the Oriental and Grecian philosophy, early identified itself with the eminently spiritual religion of Christ, and produced, as it was influenced by various circumstances,* almost every species of extravagance and fanaticism. The various sects of the Gnostics, from the first to the third or

* These are popularly set forth in the 8th and 9th sections of the "Natural History of Enthusiasm":—"Sketch of the Enthusiasm of the Ancient Church"; "Ingredients of the Ancient Monachism."

fourth century, partook largely of it. It drove the Anchorites, Ascetics, and Monks, of what are commonly called the dark ages, to desert the incumbent duties of life, that they might bury themselves in useless and unhallowed retirements, and to torment themselves with various uncommanded austerities. In these retreats it survived the shock which the religious world received at the period of the Reformation. It discovered itself in almost all the different sects into which Christendom was afterwards divided. It found favor, in the same degree, amongst the Jansenists and Quietists of France, with the Pietists of Germany, and with the Methodists, Moravians, and Quakers of England and America. It pervaded minds which seem to have had little else in common. It mingled equally in the noisy and vulgar fanaticism of Peter Boehme, and in that abstraction, and deadness to the outward world and to all earthly desires, which Father Molinos preached, and Fenelon delighted to advocate. It was the animating principle of the pure and active, but somewhat overstrained and impracticable piety of men like Spenser, and the learned recluses of the Society of the Port Royal ; and was the very inspiration of the extravagant fancies and rapturous day-dreams of Madame Guyon and of Elizabeth Rowe.

But these are the least melancholy of the perversions of the doctrine of Divine Influence, since, from the nature of the case, they can never become permanent or widely spread. They are too much at war with man as he is, and with man as he is

placed in this world, ever to gain a general acceptance. And they must be confined, moreover, mainly to persons of a peculiar temperament and habits of mind ; to the susceptible, the visionary, the melancholic, the imaginative, and to those who are disqualified, equally by inclination and by their prevailing tone of thought and sentiment, "to hold with fortune needful strife." It is such as these, who, feeling strongly the "divinity that stirs within," and the unsatisfactoriness of human pursuits, and sick of formal piety, and lifeless ceremonies, and letter-killing doctrines, are led to aspire to an intimacy and communion with the Infinite and Eternal, which our present "veils of flesh" do not yet permit us to enjoy. This mystical perversion of the doctrine of Divine Influence can, therefore, never gain any very extensive prevalence ; and is to be regarded rather as a subject of mournful interest than of serious alarm. And even where it is seen most completely to prevail, it is often delightfully redeemed by trains of holy thought, capacities of willing self-sacrifice, and sublime aspirations after unearthly purity and beatific peace, which seem to open upon the soul, like partial glimpses and momentary revelations of the heavenly world.

But there are perversions of the doctrine of Divine Influence, that are not thus partially redeemed, but which are wholly evil, naked, unmitigated evil. They are those in which men mistake, or wilfully misunderstand, the suggestions of their own unbridled passions and rank prejudices, for the suggestions of God's holy

spirit, and commit excesses, in consequence, at once the most absurd and shocking. The history of the Church, from the day of Pentecost until now, furnishes continual examples of this. The well authenticated laws of God, the rights, claims, feelings, and consciences of His rational offspring, have been ruthlessly trampled upon by men, who, in a self-deception more or less sincere, have believed themselves to be following a light from heaven. In like manner, what is thus ignorantly and most presumptuously deemed to be the impulses of the spirit of God has been claimed as the highest authority in the interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures; and thus, superseding the use of our rational faculties, and the resources of learning, has been made to hallow errors the most bald, and contradictions the most palpable. Indeed, it is a mournful saying, yet one but too well authenticated by the whole history of Christianity, that there is scarcely a folly, or an absurdity, or a fraud connected with our religion, for which the authentic impress of the spirit of God has not thus been claimed.

The subject, then, is one of unutterable moment; and it is one which has been, and which is, greatly misunderstood and perverted. It is on both these accounts that we now address ourselves to the consideration of it, in some of its more important aspects and relations. We write for the benefit of honest and serious inquirers, whose minds are yet open to conviction. We trust that we feel the deep solemnity of the inquiry, and would divest ourselves of every thought and sen-

timent, which are not in entire unison with the theme. In the noble language of Milton, we know that the truth in respect to it "is not to be obtained but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and all knowledge;" and we are fully aware that our efforts can be successful only so far as they are guided by that Divine Influence, whose nature and manifestations we are attempting to ascertain.

CHAPTER II.

General Division of the Subject. Credibility of the Doctrine, independently of express Revelation.

THE remarks we have to offer will be arranged under two distinct topics of inquiry. First, What are the grounds upon which the doctrine of Divine Influence rests? and, second, What are the methods in which this Influence operates, or is manifested?

Our first inquiry, namely, What are the grounds upon which the doctrine rests?, is important, not only because it lies at the basis of all our subsequent researches in respect to it; but because it is a part of the subject, we apprehend, which it has been too common to pass over with only a

slight and superficial attention. And this is one reason, why a doctrine so all-concerning as this is, if well founded, is frequently received and maintained, even by serious and thoughtful spirits, in an apathy and deadness of mind, which is only one remove from absolute skepticism ; and which, so far as practical results are concerned, is scarcely better than total unbelief. We propose, therefore, to state, in some detail, those arguments which appear to our own minds the most cogent and affecting, by which the reality of a Divine Influence over the human mind is substantiated. And privileged, indeed, shall we deem ourselves, if in this, or in any of the subsequent inquiries, we shall be able to suggest any thing, by which the great truths relating to this subject shall be taken out of the cold region of merely speculative belief, authenticated as realities, endowed with a living power, clothed with their rightful influence, and brought into a more actual, home-felt, and abiding presence with any mind.

What, then, are the proofs by which the doctrine of this Divine Influence is substantiated ?

First, we observe, that there is no antecedent improbability that such an influence should be imparted. There is no intrinsic difficulty, there is nothing irrational, in the supposition. It is, at least, as probable as the opposite doctrine. For why should it be thought incredible or strange, or in any degree out of the ordinary course of things, that God should hold an intimate intercourse with the souls He has called into being ?

No one, who is acquainted with the operations of the human mind, can doubt that this *may* be done, and this too, without interfering with its obvious and acknowledged laws of action. So far from this, there is an express provision, or, at least, a means, an opportunity, furnished for such an intercourse, through the intervention of these very laws. We refer to that part of our mental constitution, by which thoughts, feelings, suggestions arise, and states of mind take place independently of our volitions. This is matter of every day's experience. Effective trains of thought long searched for in vain, results which have baffled our most earnest pursuit, truths which have evaded our keenest inquiry, often occur to us suddenly, and as it were spontaneously, in vivid and distinct reality. This, indeed, is often the fact when our minds appear to be passive, or engaged with other subjects, or partially buried in sleep, or struggling in the dim consciousness of our first awakening from slumber. In like manner, it must be obvious to all who have tried to think, that some slight defect or flaw in a process of reasoning, which has vitiated the whole, is not unfrequently removed, we know not why, or how, and the whole argument is thus left clear and availing. In like manner, too, forms of beauty and loveliness unknown to earth, which no direct efforts of ours could have created or summoned, come, as it should seem, of their own accord, and stand revealed before our mental vision. Thus every faculty seems to have powers of its own, which are wholly independent

of any specific action of the will.* Every object, which can be presented to the mind, may be thus endowed with a *suggestive* power, far beyond any resources it possesses in its own proper self; and this will vary with, and be indefinitely modified by, the habits and associations of individual minds. In this manner it is that the fairy-land of the Drama, of Romance, of Poetry, and the imaginative arts is created and peopled; for

“Nothing is lost upon him that sees
With an eye that feeling gave;
For him there’s a story in every breeze,
And a picture in every wave.”

The same account is to be given of the fact that results of a practical kind, and of the most momentous importance, are frequently connected, in that sequence of events which men call cause and effect, with circumstances so trivial, and with states of mind so evanescent, as to escape our notice. Inventions and discoveries, which have

* This is strikingly illustrated in the Autobiography (*Dietung und Wahrheit*) of Goethe, in the 8th Vol. of his posthumous works. We are indebted for the following extract and translation to the Foreign Quarterly Review No. XXVII. “The exercise of this poetical endowment might, it is true, be excited and directed by the occasion; but it came forth most gladly and richly without any act of volition, nay, even contrary to my will. * * * As I lay awake at night also, it fell out in the same manner.” The Reviewer adds some other examples of the same fact. Pope complains that he had been waiting three weeks for his imagination to kindle. Coleridge found it necessary that the creative power of his mind should lie “fallow” occasionally. It were easy to cite a vast number of examples to the same effect.

altered the whole aspect of society, have been thus originated. The swinging of a lamp at a Popish ceremony suggested to an observant mind, in a comparatively ignorant age, the best method we yet possess of measuring time. The connexion between the fall of an apple and the development of the law which the planetary hosts obey is familiar to every schoolboy. The flight of some birds, seen by a certain individual, at a particular point and place, and in a particular mood of mind, taken in connexion with the particular currents of the winds and waves then prevailing, seems to have been that event, in Providence, which turned from these Atlantic States a Spanish population, Spanish habits, Spanish manners and literature, the Romish religion, and all the abuses of a worn out monarchy, under which a sister-continent is now suffering.* And, to take an example of the same general fact, but of a more personal concern, no man can look back upon the history of his past life, or of the past year, without perceiving that events of the deepest interest to him have sprung from circumstances, which, at the time, were so apparently trivial as not to arrest his attention. Nay, it is not too much to say, that a word, a look, a tone, yet further, that an impression, which we unconsciously give or receive, may influence the whole of life, here and hereafter.

Now, to apply these remarks to the point for the illustration of which they were introduced, is it not plain that He, to whom all finite minds are

* See Irving's "Life of Columbus," Vol. I. p. 144.

perfectly known, to whom all their avenues are open, who can give a significance to the most trivial circumstances, and add intensity to the slightest emotion that affects them; who can thus, in a thousand ways, give them clearer ideas, quicker apprehensions, more extended views of divine truth; and who can thus, even without their own consciousness, lead them to any result, — may interpose, and influence, and guide them to will and to do, of His good pleasure, and this too, not only without interfering with any known laws of the human mind, but by the very agency of these laws?

There is, thus, a provision made in what we would here call the *moral* providence of God, that is, in behalf of the human mind and the spiritual wellbeing of man, precisely analogous to that which is also made in His natural and physical providence, or in the ordering of external things to effect His purposes. As, in regard to this, we know only the few proximate causes or circumstances which precede any given event, but are ignorant of those which are remote; it is evident that, by altering any of these remoter causes which lie beyond our ken or knowledge, God may bring to pass any event, not only without disturbing any of the established laws of nature, but by the direct instrumentality of these laws. In like manner in regard to the human mind, as we know not the order or connexion according to which ideas or feelings are regulated, it is obvious that any thought or sentiment may be suggested, or any mental result produced, not

only without interfering with any known principles of the mind, but by the direct and natural operation of these principles.

But this is the lowest view of the subject. It is not only possible, and in strict conformity with the known laws of the human mind, that such an influence *may* be exerted, but it is, further, in the highest degree probable that such an influence *is*, in fact, continually exerted.

We think this is clearly to be inferred, first, from the known and acknowledged Attributes or perfections of God. Thus, for example, we ascribe to Him Spirituality. But can we conceive of an *inactive* Spirit? And if it be admitted that this Infinite Spirit is active, that it pervades, as the life-giving principle, all creation, that it is the first cause, the continuing power, and the last end of all material things, can we believe that it avoids or neglects that spiritual being which is but a part, an expression of itself?

Again; we ascribe Omnipresence to God. But can we believe He is every where else, above us, below us, around us, and yet not *in* us? And if thus in us, can we believe that He is there idle and inoperative?

Again; we ascribe Almightyness to God; and this we do not regard as an unused or 'useless prerogative. But if used, and with an unceasing, ever-present, all-pervading energy, are human minds alone exempted or precluded from its sway?

Again; God is infinitely good, and this goodness is continually exhibiting itself in all that we

behold. It is seen throughout the material world, in countless provisions for human happiness, where this happiness is the sole end of the provision, and where, but for this end, it would be a superfluous work. And this is goodness, indeed! But is it rational to believe that human souls, which alone of all created things here on the earth can understand and appreciate this goodness, are passed by and forgotten in the midst of its ceaseless flow?

In like manner, it is obvious that the presence and agency of God with the human mind may be inferred from all His perfections; since it is irrational to suppose that these perfections would exhaust themselves on inferior objects, and leave untouched that "spirit of man," for the use and development of which all things else were made.

But we turn to another view of the subject. The influence of God upon the minds of men is to be proved in the same way as the *particular* providence of God is proved; indeed, it will be found to be, on close analysis, but a branch of the same great doctrine. And here it may be proper to state what we understand by a Particular Providence. And it is, that God's care of the works of His hand is minute, and not merely general; that it extends to the parts as well as to the whole; that it is as essentially operating in the smallest particle of matter, as in the globe of the sun, in the most trivial circumstance of our individual history, as in those systems after systems, worlds after worlds, which reach far beyond human ken

and human conception, deeper and deeper into the unfathomable abyss of space.

This doctrine of a Particular Providence is opposed to the thought, that God, having originally arranged a system of things, which is called, in an old and in a modern philosophy, an order of nature, and having established some general laws for its operation, threw it, as it were, aside, as an artist does a piece of finished machinery ; henceforth dismissed it from any further and particular care ; and left it to run its rounds, under the blind guidance of some leading principles originally incorporated with it, until its functions, by their own limitation, should cease.

It is opposed to the doctrine, that God, in His universe, only takes care of some general and important results, and leaves small events to fall out as they may.

It is opposed to the Heathenish notions of Chance and Accident as having any agency in human affairs, or in the world around us ; notions, we may observe in passing, which the conduct and common conversation of men show to be by no means confined to the heathens.

In a word, it is opposed to every supposition, which, in any way, directly or by implication, withdraws the notice and care of God from any conceivable thing or circumstance which exists or takes place in His whole universe, from the grand and stupendous whole, to the minutest part of the minutest particle of matter ; from those events which decide the destiny of king-

doms, to those which are so trifling as to escape our individual consciousness.

Now, as we have intimated, the doctrine of a Particular Providence, thus explained, involves, as a component part of it, the doctrine of a Spiritual Influence; and the same arguments, by which the one is sustained, apply with equal force to the other. Thus it is urged in favor of this particular agency and care of God over the works of His creation, that if He do not thus regard and superintend small things as well as great, it must be, either because they are too insignificant to be worthy of His notice, or because His knowledge and power are exhausted in the production of great results, so that there is none left for details; in fewer words, that God will not, or cannot, attend to minute things. And it is rightly inferred that an argument, which, when thus examined, is resolved into a limitation of those perfections, which all, at the outset, admit to be infinite, is necessarily unsound and worthless. But it is obvious that this argument applies to the operations of the mind as well as to the phenomena of matter, to the movements of every thought as well as to the movements of the external world.

Again; it is urged that the superintending care of God over things the most minute, is proved by the same course of reasoning as that by which His general providence is proved. And this appears from the fact, that all those events and circumstances, which are called small and unimportant, are *parts*, and indis-

pensable parts, of that vast scheme, by which worlds are upheld and kept in their proper place and order. The pebble, which we throw into the air, returns by the same law which regulates the movements of the spheres. It is a fact, plainly demonstrable, that the removal of a particle of dust from our earth, would disturb the movements, and affect the condition, of the farthest star ; and each and every one, therefore, of these minute particles, as well as the great luminaries of heaven, must have and hold its appointed place and commission in the great scheme of things. It is obvious, then, that the same train of reasoning, which we apply to the whole of this vast scheme, is equally applicable to every part of it. But is not this argument as clearly applicable to mental and moral phenomena, as to material things? If it be admitted that God exercises a superintendency over the minds of men in producing great results, can we deny it in regard to those which are of inferior importance? Is not the concurrence of these latter necessary to the former? and do they not, in fact, make an essential part of the great moral plan of the Divine government?

And, further, as we infer that God's continual care is over all, from the fact that this is as necessary to the *preservation* and *continued* wellbeing of the things that are made, as was creative power to call them into being at first, so this is true of every individual thing, however small or apparently insignificant ; since this, as

we have shown, is an essential part of the vast and all-comprehending scheme. In a word, continued preservation is as much an act and an expression of Omnipotence and Divine care, as was original creation, and this applies to every part, as well as to the general arrangement of the whole; and hence it is justly held that there is no foundation for the distinction which is often made between a general and particular Providence. So intimate are the mutual connexions among all things that exist, and between general results and the minute methods by which these results are produced, that whatever we assert of the one must be asserted of the other; and the same argument by which it is proved that God cares and provides for any thing, must also necessarily prove that He cares and provides for every thing.

And now the application of this train of remark to the subject before us is obvious. Does the *continuance* of the material world and all that therein is evince, at every successive instant of its continuance, the exercise of a power as active, and as efficient, and as *present*, as that which first called it into being? and can we doubt that God's spiritual and moral world is sustained and directed by a like continual exhibition of creative energy? Nay, is not this true for a stronger reason, since human spirits are the brightest manifestations of Divine power? and is it rational to think that He would be present by His august agency to the insensate particles of matter, and direct them in all their

appointed evolutions, and yet withdraw this agency from those spiritual natures, which, by their very constitution, He is declaring to us, are nothing less than emanations from His own Intelligence? Does He care for stocks and stones? does He establish a covenant of His providence with the clods of the valley? does He connect the vegetating seed in mysterious union with all the elementary principles of nature? does He so order the weight of the earth, and measure the sea, and arrange the length of the seasons, and temper the sun, and compound the atmosphere, that each may minister in its due proportion and influence to the development of every little plant?—and can we believe that He passes by, in unconcern, those spiritual and immortal beings, which are the most express images of Himself? For our own part, when we look upon the upspringing of a blade of grass, or upon an opening flower-bud, and observe the minute care that is taken of them in their early state, and watch their progress to maturity, we can have no doubt that God is nigh to human souls; and we feel, with our whole hearts, the full force and subduing power of the Saviour's appeal — “O ye distrustful, shall He not much more care for you?”

The relations that God sustains to His human family, in like manner, lead us to infer that a Divine Influence is exerted upon the human mind. We look to Him as our Moral Governor, the Inspector, Judge, and Rewarder of men. We believe that He has purposes to subserve in

regard to every individual, as such, and also as being a component part of that kingdom, which is over all, in heaven and on earth, and is from everlasting to everlasting. And is it rational to suppose, that, holding these interesting relations, and having such objects to subserve, and possessing, moreover, entirely open access to the minds of men, He should confine His agency to the mere dead letter of certain positive laws? Even earthly governors, if they are wise, endeavour to give effect to their enactments by every species of moral influence; well knowing that without this all their legislation is vain, and that constitutions, and compacts, and prescriptions, are but as paper walls in the way of the aggressor.

“ Ill fares that land, to hastening ills a prey,
Whate’er accumulates, where *men* decay.”

The history of the world is one continued commentary on that vital principle in civil government, that, when the moral sense of a community is perverted or deadened, its ruin is already sealed; the fatal handwriting on the wall has been traced; and “God has numbered and finished it.” And can we believe, that, in the Divine government, where not merely the execution of the laws, or certain general results are regarded, but where the moral welfare of every individual, considered as a moral agent, is the final end of the whole arrangement, those Divine influences are withholden, which are so eminently adapted, if not, indeed, absolutely necessary, to secure the proposed result?

But this relation of governor and subject is one of the most loose and distant, so to speak, that God sustains in respect to man. We are His by creation ; His by preserving care ; His by a ceaseless, boundless, and ineffable love ; His by various dear and intimate ties which bind us to no other being. No words can express the nearness of God to us. We make the best approach to it, when we take up the Saviour's language and call upon Him as "our Father, who is in Heaven." And what is implied in this relation ? If we would know, we must inquire what is implied in it as it exists among creatures like ourselves. It is thus alone we can learn to understand it. And if we are conversant with what passes in human hearts, we know, that if there be any love, which, unmindful of all merely selfish aims, centres singly upon its object, it is this. We know that if there be any sentiment, which triumphs over all obstacles, and rejoices in personal sacrifices ; which animates our labors day by day, and all the day, and wakes and watches by night ; which gains new intensity from the trials it is called to endure, and new fervor, depth, and tenderness from unwelcome and forbidding events ; which never wavers, never tires, never changes, never fails ; which outlasts the absence, outlives the life, and survives the unworthiness of its objects, — it is parental love. We know that words are cold and powerless to describe it, that there is more felt in any single pulsation of a parent's heart, than there is more seen in a single glance of parental affection, that

there is more heard in any single tone of parental endearment, than the most gifted tongue can tell. And yet this sentiment, strongly and purely as it exists in human bosoms, is but a faint and shadowy emblem of our heavenly Father's love. It only gives us some intimation of the nature of the sentiment, but falls as far beneath the great reality, as the earth is beneath the heavens. And can we believe that a sentiment like this, pervading, if we may reverently use the expression, the bosom of the Infinite God, should prompt to no near intercourse with its objects? Is it not, rather, far more rational to infer that it should lead to a communion with them, constant, intimate, suited to their natures, adapted to their wants, and answering to all their pure aspirations and devout desires? It is, indeed, so rational a conclusion, that it enters, as an essential truth, into various forms of religion, which have little else in common.

We next observe that this Influence of God upon the human mind not only involves nothing strange or unnatural, but, on the contrary, may be regarded as analogous to what we know of the influence which human minds exercise over each other. If we examine the methods in which impulse and guidance are imparted from mind to mind, in the ordinary intercourse of society, we shall find that it is by no means confined to direct and palpable instruction, but that, in addition to this, we are continually receiving impressions from those around us, which it is impossible to embody in language. These it is difficult to

analyze, since they spring from very various and often very minute sources, but yet, in their combined effect, are as clear and decisive as the most full and elaborate instruction. They are given out often, -indeed most commonly, without the consciousness of him from whom they emanate, and are received, in like manner, unconsciously into the minds of others. But their effect is not, on this account, less distinct, obvious, and permanent. These remarks apply with peculiar force to the influence which is continually exerted by superior minds over those around them. In every circle, and in every little community, much of the prevailing habits of thought, feeling, and sentiment is to be traced to this unwritten and unspoken instruction. It is a part of the arrangement of Providence that it should be so; and the communication of an influence from the Infinite Mind to inferior minds, to which they are open and accessible in countless ways, is in entire accordance with that system by which they are continually operating upon each other. And as an express revelation of important truth from God bears a strict analogy to that mode of instruction by which the better informed impart information to the ignorant; so the doctrine of an Influence, proceeding from Him, is perfectly analogous to those less obvious or imperceptible impressions, which, in ordinary circumstances, superior minds impart to those around them.

There is one other illustration of this part of the subject, which we are not willing wholly to

omit. The doctrine of Divine Influence is rational, and commends itself, before inquiry, to our belief, because it is necessary to the growth of all the pious and devotional sentiments of our nature. What were God, without the thought, not only that He is, but that He is the present Helper and Friend of all that call upon Him in truth and love? Let any one imagine, if he can, that He is a Being, who, having created the universe, and placed man therein, and enacted certain laws for his direction, then retired from any further care or interest in His work, and left man to go on and fill up, as he might, his trial scene of life. Will he not find, by this supposition, that he has disrobed his God of all that is truly interesting or affecting in His character, and that he has left himself no object that he can either love or adore? Is God still the Father of His human family? It is a Father wholly regardless of His children. Is He still their Inspector and Guardian? It is with the cold eye of indifference. Is He still their Everlasting Friend? It must be a relation they can neither see, nor feel, nor understand, since it cuts off all but formal and distant intercourse with its objects. Is it not plain, that a Being like this offers us nothing on which our affections may centre and repose? He may yet, indeed, by His ineffable attributes of greatness, wisdom, and power, excite emotions of fear, wonder, and awe; but such a God presents to our hearts an idea as dead and blank, so far as tender and confiding sentiments are concerned, as are the heathenish notions of Nature, Fate,

or Destiny. The God of Christians is removed from the universe. For ourselves, we shrink from the denial of a doctrine which necessarily involves such consequences as these. And it seems to us far more rational to believe, that, as intercourse and sympathy with our fellow-beings are necessary to the very existence of the social affections, so those which are peculiarly and essentially devout, need to be quickened and kept alive, at all times, by a direct and heart-felt communion with God, their appropriate object. Indeed, without this communion, (and we trust that we speak to the experience of many of our readers here,) some of the strongest wants and calls of our nature are neglected and unanswered. The soul was made for a fealty more intense, confiding, engrossing, than any thing earthly can inspire. It yearns for an alliance which the earth cannot supply. It feels a weakness which none other than an almighty arm can sustain. It has longings, and hopes, and aspirations, which, passing the line of time and the boundaries of created things, can find their fitting objects, and their true repose, only within the throne of the Eternal. And can we believe that a communion so necessary to the soul, and for which the soul was thus evidently made, and without which the God of Christians is virtually stricken out of His moral universe, and man bereft of his highest reliance and disappointed in his most distinctive and cherished affections, is denied?

In these remarks, we are aware that we have

made only an approach to the precise question at issue before us. This is, whether the doctrine of a Spiritual Influence, in the sense in which it has been explained, is a Christian doctrine; whether it is asserted authoritatively in the New Testament; whether it is to be ranked among those new and *additional* prerogatives, which belong to the disciples of Jesus Christ? Still we deem these preparatory remarks important to a right understanding of this subject. Since, if it can be shown that the doctrine is a rational doctrine; that it contains and involves nothing, which, before inquiry into any alleged revelation concerning it, should excite doubt or distrust; but, on the other hand, that it is one which is rendered highly probable by all we know of the constitution of the human mind, of the character of God, of His relations to His creatures, and of the connexion of these creatures with each other,—we shall be better prepared to examine and estimate the direct evidence which is urged in its support. Indeed, we apprehend that the most fatal obstacles which prevail in the minds of men, both against the claims of Christianity in general, as divine, and against its leading doctrines, rightly understood, arise from objections existing antecedently to all inquiry, and which are never thoroughly examined. Of this description are all those doubts which are suggested by what is vaguely thought to be the strangeness of the Gospel scheme, and its want of conformity with things already admitted to be true. And in respect to the par-

ticular inquiry before us, we are persuaded that much of the half-believing and skepticism which exist on this subject, springs from an ignorance or forgetfulness of those relations which God has established between Himself and us; and that if we could feel any thing approaching to an adequate sense of the intimacy of His union to our souls, we should no longer be doubtful in regard to His gracious influence upon them.

CHAPTER III.

Subject Continued. Argument from Scripture.

WE now proceed to ascertain what additional light the Scriptures have thrown on this important subject. But, as these pages are not the proper place for minute or elaborate Scriptural criticism, we shall cite only those passages, from the New Testament,* which, in our apprehen-

* It might be fairly expected of the author, that, as the reason assigned in the text no longer exists, in regard to the form which the Essay has now taken, he should render the Scriptural argument more full and elaborate. But as the objections, which, so far as he knows, have been urged against this part of the subject, are of a very various and contradictory import, some regarding the argument as already pressed too far, and others as not being carried far enough; the author has concluded to

sion, have a direct bearing on the question at issue, with as few remarks as possible in illustration of their meaning and pertinency.

And, in the first place, we may observe that it is not, perhaps, to be expected that the doctrine of Divine Influence, as here maintained,

insert it here, after revision, very much as it was originally published. An extract from a private letter of a venerable friend, and one, who, if named, would be admitted, by all persons qualified to judge, to be of an authority second to none on this question, places the subject, in regard to the real difficulty of the case, probably, in its true light. "I do not perceive what ground of doubt you can have as to the doctrine of Divine Influence being expressed, or clearly implied, in those passages of Scripture which you have selected. They are not the only ones. Far from it. The Bible, it seems to me, is full of it. There are many other texts as conclusive; but I do not know that there are any more so, or any that should be selected in preference to those you have chosen. But the difficulty on the subject lies, not in any doubt, whether Divine Influence be a doctrine of the Bible. None, I presume, will call this in question. The difficulty is, to state with precision, and in an intelligible manner, what the doctrine is, what is meant by Divine Influence. And here, that is, in our interpretation of those texts which relate to the subject, and which all agree do teach the doctrine, there is, doubtless, room for diversity of opinion." In this opinion the author entirely coincides. He is fully aware that there is great "diversity of opinion" even in respect to the texts cited here. They will, undoubtedly, bear, if they do not require, a different interpretation. And they are retained, and presented anew to the public, not from any overweening confidence in their pertinency, still less in the correctness of the exposition here given of them, but that this view of them may be fairly given and submitted to the consideration of inquirers on this subject.

should have been matter of distinct and literal Revelation, since it is virtually recognised in the whole moral government of God as made known in the Scriptures. It is implied, as we have shown, in the doctrine of a Particular Providence, a doctrine with which the whole Bible, and, particularly, the instructions of the Saviour are fraught; it is implied in the inculcations and encouragements of the duty of prayer; it is implied in the commands and assurances by which we are urged and invited to cast ourselves upon God as a present Ruler, Father, Helper, and Friend; and it is implied in all that class of texts in which God is said to "be working in men both to will and to do, of His good pleasure." Such being the pervading import of the Scriptures in reference to this subject, we should feel authorized to maintain that the doctrine before us were sufficiently sustained on Scriptural authority, though there were no specific texts which taught it in so many words. We shall, however, adduce a few passages, in confirmation of our views of this subject. At the same time we are well enough aware that these passages have been understood differently, — that nothing more is intended by them, and those similar to them, than, first, those miraculous gifts which were confined to the apostolic age; or, second, the Gospel itself in its truths, and influences, and sanctions, illustrated by the events subsequent to the crucifixion of the Saviour; or, third, those pious dispositions and feelings which it is calculated to produce.

It is important, in an inquiry like this, to ascertain in what sense the phrase, the spirit of God, and those identical with it, were used by the Hebrews, in reference to the mind or soul of man; since their language, particularly as it is recorded in their Scriptures, was continually imitated by the writers of the New Testament. It is used, then, to indicate any mental, moral, or spiritual gift, or endowment, of any kind, divinely communicated, by which the recipient, thus assisted by divine power, was excited and enabled to perform acts surpassing the unassisted powers of human nature;* and upon those thus aided, the spirit of God was said to descend, and they were also said to be led by the spirit. And in this sense, the spirit of God is declared by John to descend upon Jesus at his baptism. (Matt. iii. 16.) The analogous term in the New Testament is holy spirit; and it has, as we have already observed, been interpreted by different inquirers in very different ways. Without referring any more particularly to these, the general meaning of the term, as it seems to us, is, a divine power, which was manifested to the Apostles and to their immediate followers in various ways; and one to which every thing belonging to the establishment and propagation of Christ's religion, and

* The following passages are referred to by different commentators in illustration of this: Exod. xxxi. 3; Jud. iii. 10; vi. 34; xi. 29; xiv. 6; xv. 14; 1 Sam. xvi. 13, 23; Isa. lxi. 1; Ezek. i. 3.

all that goes to form the Christian character, is referred.

The great error to which, as we apprehend, inquirers on this subject have been exposed is, that of considering the promises of the holy spirit, which had reference to miraculous gifts, and were confined to the apostolic age, as belonging, in common, to all Christians of all ages.* In the discussion now before us we shall endeavour to keep this remark constantly in view.

We shall probably be anticipated, by all who have attended to this inquiry, in the first reference we shall make to the Christian Scriptures. It is to the remarkable conversation of our Lord with Nicodemus (John iii. 3—14), and especially to the words, "*Unless a man be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*" We are aware of the various interpretations which have been given of the words, "born of the spirit;" but we consider those commentators most correct, who conclude, that, if the words in question be viewed in connexion with the illustration of them, which is afforded in the 8th verse, following; and in connexion with the language of Paul to Titus, (iii. 5,) of

* This mistake is very common in most treatises on this subject. It runs through and vitiates the Scriptural argument of Dr. Sprague (see Sprague on Revivals, pp. 74, 75) on this subject, which is, moreover, very inconclusive on other accounts. And the same error is apparent in many of the letters of the twenty-three Divines, which make up the remaining part of the volume.

Luke, (xviii. 27,) in which God's agency in the salvation of men is contrasted with their own weakness and inability; and especially if they be brought into comparison with various passages, in which a change from sin to holiness is denoted by the phrase, "born of God," (as, for example, John i. 13, and in various places in the 1st Epistle of John); it will be apparent, that the phrase, "born of the spirit," can mean nothing less than a special though not miraculous effect, produced by an influence proceeding from God, as its cause, and operating through the religion of His Son, as the means.

Luke xi. 13. "If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy spirit to them that ask him!" It is, then, promised to all who seek it.

In the last solemn and affecting interview of our Lord with his disciples, previously to his crucifixion, and in immediate connexion with the promise of divine aid in their peculiar mission, which, under the designation of Paraclete, Helper, Advocate, and Comforter, was to be with them in all their labors and trials, for guidance and support, he subjoins the following words, (John xiv. 21,). "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, *and will manifest myself to him.*" It is obvious, that, whatever this promise may mean, it is not confined to those whom he then immediately addressed, but is general in its application, and is extended to *all who love him*. What,

then, is the import of the promise, "*I will manifest myself to him*"? We cannot stop to notice the various meanings which have been put upon this language. The only unforced and rational one, and that which best answers to all the circumstances under which the promise was uttered and received, is, "To those who love me I will show myself beneficent, and kind, and ready to assist, as if I were in real presence with them." It is equivalent to the promise made to his immediate followers, in the preceding verse: "*I am in you.*" And as this, in regard to them, included a promise of all necessary aid in the extraordinary labors to which they were destined, in the first propagation and establishment of the religion of Christ among men; so the words under remark may naturally be understood to mean nothing less than a promise of all needed assistance to "all who love him," in the ordinary circumstances of their discipleship on earth.

This construction is sustained and fortified by the explanation which our Saviour himself gives, in immediate connexion with the passage cited. In reply to Judas, who asked an explanation of the words, Jesus said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and *we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.*" This was a metaphorical phrase, well known to the Jews, and was used to express intimate presence, especial favor, and essential aid. It will be observed, too, that this promise, like that in illustration of which it is

used, is general; it is made to "all who love Christ." If these views are correct, the words, "I will manifest myself to him," and "we will make our abode with him," contain the promise of all needed spiritual aid; and it is made to all, in all times, "who love" the Saviour. We are unwilling to crowd our pages with the learned lumber of quotations and references. Those who have gone into this inquiry will perceive that the interpretation we have here given is sanctioned by the most competent and unprejudiced commentators, from Grotius down to the present day, including those, who, in regard to many other important points of doctrine, are much at variance.

We think, further, that this doctrine of a Divine Influence is clearly taught and strongly urged by St. Paul, in various parts of his Epistles.

Thus, the Apostle wrote to his converts in Galatia, (iv. 6,) "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." There seems to be no reason for restricting this promise to the Galatian converts. They were called sons, because they were redeemed from the slavery of the Jewish law. And so were all Christians. And if we understand the phrase, "the spirit of his Son," to mean the mind or temper which was in Christ, (as to our apprehension is clear, from comparing this passage with Rom. viii. 13—16., 2 Cor. v. 1—8., particularly the 5th verse, and with Eph. i. 13, 14,) it is evident that

the boon spoken of is one not of a miraculous character, such, for example, as the gift of "tongues," and of "healing," and the rest, which were confined to the early converts, but is of a spiritual nature, in which all Christians may hope to participate, and is, moreover, ascribed to God as its author.

To the Ephesians (i. 13, 14, just referred to), the Apostle writes, "In whom (that is, in Christ) after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance," &c. *Spirit of promise* is a well known Hebraism for *promised spirit*. We know no reason why this sealing of the promised spirit should be restricted to mean only the extraordinary gifts which were imparted to the first converts of the Apostles, and not extended also to that religious preparation of the heart, which is, in like manner, the effect of the spirit of God coöperating with ours, and which is to all who receive it, in all ages, the earnest of an immortal inheritance.

Again, the Apostle writes to the same body of disciples, (Eph. iii. 14—17,) "I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, — that he would grant you to be strengthened with might *by his spirit* in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." Here a Divine Influence, even the spirit of God, not necessarily, as we think, any miraculous gift, is recognised as important to the Ephesians, in strengthening their faith in Christ. And, if thus important to them, it cannot be less so, though

not, perhaps, in the same manifestation of it, to all Christians of all times. And if it were not to be imparted, it certainly would not have been prayed for. The same remarks apply with equal force to the earnest aspiration of the Apostle in behalf of his converts at Rome (Rom. xv. 13); "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the holy spirit."* Here a *spiritual* blessing, namely, "joy and peace in believing," and not those extraordinary powers by which the first disciples were distinguished, is sought in prayer, by an Apostle, through the agency of "the holy spirit."

Eph. iv. 30. "Grieve not the holy spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." Here, as in the passage above cited, (Eph. i. 13, 14,) the Apostle appears to mean, by "the spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed," those Christian gifts and graces, that religious preparation of the heart, which were wrought by the spirit of God, and whereby they were marked, designated, set apart, for the day of redemption; and if so, there is nothing from which we need to infer that any gift was thus possessed by them,

* Not "Ghost," as the mistranslation in our common version expresses it. It is much to be regretted, that this term should hold its place in our Bibles. We would also take this opportunity to observe, that it is, in like manner, to be regretted that the terms, holy ghost, holy spirit, and equivalent ones, should be continued to be printed with capital letters, as if a *person* were meant. It is well known to those who read the original language that there is no authority for this.

which may not, in like manner and degree, be possessed by all sincere Christians in all ages.

2 Thessalonians ii. 13. "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren, beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, *through the sanctification* of the spirit, and belief of the truth." In this passage, "sanctification" is ascribed to the agency of the spirit. See also 1 Peter, i. 22; Jude 20; where a like agency is ascribed to the holy spirit; all of which passages may be distinctly and explicitly, though concisely, explained by St. Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, (ii. 13,) "*For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of His good pleasure.*"

On all these texts, three things, we think, are especially to be noted.

First; Spiritual blessings, sanctification, religious improvement of the heart and life, and not necessarily those miraculous gifts which were conferred by the Apostles on their early converts, and confined to them, are the blessings imparted.

Second; They are ascribed to the holy spirit, the spirit of God, or simply to God, through whose agency they are imparted. And

Third; As these spiritual gifts are equally needed by all Christians of all ages, and as, if we are correct in our views of the passages, there was nothing in the peculiar circumstances of those to whom the language was originally directed, to confine its application to them, it is not necessarily so to be confined.

We conclude these quotations by referring to the Epistle to the Romans, viii. 26, 27: "Likewise the spirit helpeth our infirmities. For we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the spirit itself maketh intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." We are aware that the term here translated "spirit" has been differently interpreted. Some learned commentators have considered it as standing for the religion of Christ;* others, as indicating that temper or frame of mind which Christianity is intended to form, but which is yet to be referred to God, or the spirit of God, as its author.† But without further remarking on these opinions, we shall only observe, that the explication of the term, as given by Locke, seems to us to be the true one; namely, that it is intended to indicate a "new quickening principle and power," which operates upon the mind through the instrumentality of the religion of Christ.

Such are the Scriptural authorities on which we rest our faith in the doctrine under consideration. We have felt the necessity of condensing this part of the subject as much as possible, and, in our endeavour to be brief, may have rendered the argument obscure. However this may be, one

* See this ingeniously urged in *Jo. Aug. Noesselti Opusculorum Fasciculus* II. Halæ, 1785.

† Jo. G. Rosenmüller, Scholia in N. T. Rom. viii. 26.

great source of error, at least, which frequently obscures and destroys the reasoning of inquirers on this point, who are otherwise judicious and accurate, we have sedulously attempted to avoid; namely, that of confounding the extraordinary and miraculous aids promised to the first Apostles, and imparted by them to their immediate followers for a special purpose, with those Divine Influences, in which, as we believe, all sincere and devoted Christians of all subsequent ages may hope to participate.

We shall proceed to inquire, in the next place, — What are the methods through which this influence is afforded to the human mind?

CHAPTER IV.

Divine Influence not Supernaturally imparted to the Human Soul.

HAVING alluded to the importance of the doctrine of Divine Influence, and stated the grounds, both reason and Scripture, on which our belief of it rests, we proceed now to inquire, in the second place, — What are the *methods* in which God, or the spirit of God, influences the human mind? We have thus far pursued our course, hand in hand, with the great mass of our fellow Christians, at least, so far as the reality of these influences is concerned.

We now come to a point where our path begins to diverge from theirs, and where we shall be compelled to make the best of our way, without their company or encouragement. We must, however, continue to pursue what we deem to be the blended light of reason and revelation, though we pursue it alone; and our earnest wish, at parting with our fellow-inquirers, is, that the spirit of truth may guide us and them into all important truth. This division of the subject, moreover, requires especial attention and care; since it is here that mistakes and perversions of the doctrine most frequently occur; and it is here, too, that they assume a more practical character, and tend to results which seriously affect the conduct and happiness of men.

Before giving an affirmative answer to the question,—How, or by what methods, the Divine Influence operates upon the human mind, we shall advert to some errors, grave and lamentable, as we think, which have prevailed on this subject.

And, in the first place, we observe that this Divine Influence is not *Supernaturally* imparted. There is no evidence to prove that there is any thing *miraculous* in the methods in which it is vouchsafed to the mind. We use the words supernatural and miraculous in the ordinary sense of the terms, as signifying that which is distinct from, and superior to, the established laws of nature, or the known and ordinary operations of God's moral government. The proposition, then, before us is, — There is no reason to believe that

the influence of God upon the minds of men is manifested in a supernatural or miraculous manner, in this sense of the terms. We are aware that this proposition is not, in so many words, insisted upon by many writers of the present day, who, nevertheless, class themselves under that general denomination of Christians who yet continue to receive the doctrine in its primitive purity. Indeed, there seems to be a growing desire among the more enlightened of this class of Christians to omit the use of those phrases which express the *supernatural* character of the Divine Influence, and to substitute others, such as "saving," and "special," in their place; and this is to be noted among the auspicious signs that more correct views on the subject are beginning to prevail. But the doctrine of the strictly supernatural character of this influence was inculcated by Calvin, though much less explicitly than by many of his followers in more recent times.* It was strongly urged by Whitefield, and by the Wesleys, particularly in the early part of their career, and became in the middle part of the last century, on this side of the Atlantic, the prevailing belief. It is asserted in a variety of forms in the "Constitution of the Presbyterian Church of the United States, as amended and ratified by the General Assembly, at their Session in May,

* We refer the reader to the "Institutes of the Christian Religion," in proof of this remark, and particularly to Book II. c. 4, and to Book III. c. 1. Indeed, this is one proof, among many, of the fact, that his disciples have far out-run their master.

1821." It is plainly recognised in the creed of the Theological Institution of Andover, in this State, as well as in most of those of a similar kind, in our country, which profess to be Calvinistic in their character; and is, at the present day, the avowed and cherished belief of those Christians generally, who pass under the common name of Orthodox. On these accounts, we deem it proper to give to the doctrine a distinct and faithful examination.

In illustration of the prevalence of the doctrine of the strictly miraculous influence of God upon the mind, and for the purpose of bringing it fully and distinctly before the reader, we shall refer to the testimony of President Edwards; the celebrity of whose name, and the weight of whose authority, as well as the honest fulness and explicitness of whose statements, render his sentiments on this subject extremely interesting. Thus, in his treatise on "Religious Affections," a book which is now in unquestioned repute, and which, for three quarters of a century, has been referred to and quoted, reprinted and circulated, by the predominant classes of Christians in this country, with a deference only less than that which is paid to the Bible itself, we find passages like the following : *

"But if there be, indeed, a power, entirely different from and beyond our power, or the power of all means and instruments, and above the power of nature, which is requisite in order to

* We quote from the American edition of the "Works of President Edwards," (1808,) Vol. IV.

the production of saving grace in the heart, *according to the general profession of the country,*" &c. — p. 59.

Though this is put hypothetically, yet it is evident, from the whole course of the argument, that he believed in the reality of this power, and that it was supernaturally exercised. And it also gives us no less an authority than that of President Edwards himself, that this was the *general* profession of this country at the time he wrote.

Other extracts will show more explicitly his own individual convictions of the miraculous character of the "saving" or "gracious" operations of the spirit.

"There is no necessary connexion, in the nature of things, between any thing that a natural man may experience, while in a state of nature, and the saving grace of God's Spirit." — "There is no revealed certain connexion between a state of salvation, and any thing that a natural man can be the subject of before he believes in Christ." — p. 84.

"The Spirit of God is given to the true saints to dwell in them, as his proper lasting abode; and to influence their hearts, as a principle of a *new nature*, or as a divine, *supernatural* spring of life and action." — p. 127.

"They," that is, the unregenerate, "not only have not these communications of the Spirit of God in so high a degree as the saints, but have *nothing of that nature or kind.*" — p. 131.

"From these things it is evident, that those

gracious influences which the saints are subjects of, and the effects of God's Spirit which they experience, *are entirely above nature, altogether of a different kind from any thing that men have within themselves by nature, or only in the exercise of natural principles ; and are things which no improvement of those qualifications or principles that are natural, no advancing or exalting them to higher degrees, and no kind of composition of them, will ever bring men to ; because they not only differ from what is natural, and from every thing that natural men experience, in degree and circumstances, but also in kind ; and are of a nature vastly more excellent. And this is what I mean by supernatural, when I say that gracious affections are from those influences that are supernatural.*" — p. 133.

This, we suppose, is full and explicit enough. But it is only a specimen of that train of thought to which the whole of the second and third parts of this very able and interesting essay are devoted. He thus speaks of those "gracious exercises and affections which are wrought in the minds of the saints, through the saving influences of a Spirit of God, as involving a new inward perception or sensation of their minds, *entirely different in its nature and kind*, from any thing that ever their minds were the subjects of before they were sanctified." And, lest it should be thought that this new inward perception or sensation might be produced by any "improvement, composition, or management, of what the soul was before conscious or sensible of, or any thing

like it," he goes on distinctly to state, that this new spiritual sense and the new dispositions that attend it are not new "*faculties*," but are *new "principles"* of nature, — a *new foundation* laid in the nature of the soul, for a new kind of exercises. — pp. 133 – 135.

And, that there may be no shadow of doubt resting on his meaning, he carefully distinguishes between the natural and supernatural influences of the spirit of God upon the human mind. After speaking of some of the methods in which this spirit assists "natural men," he goes on to observe :

"And so, many other ways might be mentioned wherein the Spirit acts upon and assists natural principles ; but, *after all, it is no more than nature moved, acted upon, and improved ; here is nothing supernatural and divine.* But the Spirit of God, in his spiritual influences on the hearts of his saints, operates by infusing or exercising *new, divine, and supernatural* principles ; principles which are, indeed, a new and spiritual nature ; and principles vastly more noble and excellent than all that is in natural man." * — p. 136.

This, then, is the doctrine of the supernatural influence of the holy spirit in the conversion of the sinner. We have copied these passages in

* It would be easy to quote volumes from distinguished divines on both sides of the Atlantic, to the same purpose. Dr. Milner goes so far as to maintain, in so many words, "that this aid of the Divine Spirit is a new perceptive faculty, without which the Scriptures are insufficient for the purpose of a revelation."

full, that it might be seen that we are contending with no fancied hypothesis, or antiquated theory; and also to exhibit, on the high authority of President Edwards, and in his own words, what the doctrine is, and what it implies.

We feel compelled to reject it altogether. We find no authority for it in reason, in human experience, in the philosophy of the human mind, or in the Scriptures. We think, moreover, that it is encumbered with insuperable difficulties, and lies open to objections which are absolutely fatal. We are aware of the strength of this language, and ask the attention of our readers to some considerations by which, in our apprehension, it is authorized.

1. And, in the first place, we reject the doctrine, because those, who consider themselves to be the subjects of these supernatural influences, have not themselves, do not give, and, from the nature of the case, cannot give, to others, any sufficient evidence of the fact. We doubt not the reality of their belief, or the sincerity of their assertions; but we maintain, nevertheless, that they neither possess any proof which ought to satisfy their own minds, nor can they afford to others any adequate proof that this belief is well founded. The ground on which they believe themselves to be the subjects of a supernatural influence of the spirit of God is this, and only this, — they are strongly persuaded that such is the fact. "They see," says Locke,* whose

* Essay, Book IV. Chap. 19, "Of Enthusiasm." We refer the reader to the whole of this admirable chapter, as con-

words we here quote, as a fair and full exposition of the ground and evidence upon which the doctrine is received, "they see the light infused into their understandings, and cannot be mistaken; it is clear and visible there, like the light of bright sunshine; shows itself, and needs no other proof but its own evidence; they feel the hand of God moving them within, and the impulses of the Spirit, and cannot be mistaken in what they feel. Thus they support themselves, and are sure that reason hath nothing to do with what they see and feel in themselves; what they have a sensible experience of admits no doubt, needs no probation. Would he not be ridiculous, who should require to have it proved to him, that the light shines, and that he sees it? It is its own proof, and can have no other. When the Spirit brings light into our minds, it dispels darkness. We see it as we do that of the sun at noon, and need not the twilight of reason to show it us. This light from heaven is strong, clear, and pure, and carries its own demonstration with it; and we may as rationally take a glowworm to assist us to discover the sun, as to examine the celestial ray by our dim candle, reason." * * *

"This," he goes on to observe, "this is the way of talking of these men. They are sure, because they are sure; and their persuasions are right, only because they are strong in them. For, when what they say is stripped of the metaphor of see-

taining the most powerful antidote and corrective of all "Enthusiasm" on this subject, that is to be found, within the same compass.

ing and feeling, this is all it amounts to; and yet these similes so impose on them, that they serve them for certainty in themselves, and demonstration to others."

This we believe to be the true statement of the matter; and the evidence adduced in support of a supernatural illumination of the mind resolves itself, when examined and divested of figurative language, into this, namely, — a strong persuasion of the fact. But what proof is there that the persons thus affected are not *self-deceived* in this? What test or criterion have they, by which they can distinguish these alleged extraordinary operations of the spirit from the movements of an excited mind? If they have no evidence to offer in support of this, save the strength of their persuasions, if they speak of a supernatural light which shines by its own inherent lustre, — what is this but saying that they believe because they believe? If they yield their belief to an impression or impulse because it comes from God, the reason, undoubtedly, is a good one. But the question is, *How do they know* it came from God? If the answer be, as in fact it is, that they are strongly persuaded of it, they know it to be so; the question recurs, *Why* are they persuaded of it? *How* do they know it to be so? If there be no proof of this, as there, confessedly, is not, besides the impression or impulse itself; if there be no *rational* grounds for this belief, as there certainly is not, for, if there were, its whole nature would be changed; then the statement of their belief is reduced to this, — they believe the impulse to be

from God because it is divine, and they believe it to be divine because it comes from God.

But further, the argument in support of the miraculous influences of the spirit not only is thus found, when strictly examined, to revolve in a vicious circle, and is, in consequence, unavailing and nugatory; *but it is wanting in that very species of evidence on which it is professedly grounded.* We ask particular attention to this point. This evidence in support of the supernatural influence in question is, we are told, the highest possible. It is no less than the evidence of consciousness. The impression, or state of mind, bears with it, they assert, the marks of its divine origin, and of this they are *conscious*. But of what are they conscious? Of nothing, certainly, but the impression or state of mind itself. That it has these marks of divinity is merely a matter of *inference*. It is strong, it is peculiar, and hence they *infer* that it is divine. The whole evidence, then, of consciousness, which is so confidently relied upon, when closely analyzed, amounts to this, and nothing more; — all that is made known by consciousness is the existence of the impression; but that this impression is supernatural, which is the very point to be proved, is only an *inference which the mind itself makes*; and it is one, moreover, which, from the nature of the case, is extremely liable to be erroneous. There is, then, no evidence of consciousness whatsoever.

But not only is the doctrine unsustained by any sufficient evidence, and not only is it want-

ing in that particular species of evidence on which it professedly rests, but this is the fact in respect to a subject that requires proof of a high and extraordinary kind. This will appear from considering that the influences of the spirit under remark are of a *miraculous* or *supernatural* character. Now the only *adequate* proof of such a miraculous influence upon the human mind is *miraculous agency*. Nothing short of this is sufficient evidence of the fact. Nothing less than this *can* substantiate it. No one, without this evidence, is authorized to believe that he is himself the subject of such an influence; and no one, without this evidence, has any claims to be considered by others as being the subject of such an influence. Ordinary states of mind are established by ordinary testimony. Those which are extraordinary require to be authenticated by this kind of proof in a higher degree. But those which are asserted to be miraculous, that is, above or beyond the common laws of nature, require to be established by those specific acts or events which are miraculous, that is, those which are above or beyond the common laws of nature. We repeat, then, though it is almost a self-evident proposition, that the only sufficient proof of a miraculous *influence* exerted on any mind is a miraculous *agency*, or *exhibition of this influence*. These principles are recognised in all the recorded acts of God's interposition in human affairs. When He gave the light of prophecy and divine revelations to holy men of old, He gave, with them, those visible

signs of His peculiar power and presence, which were a decisive confirmation of them to their own minds and to the minds of others. It was something besides a strong persuasion, in the mind of Moses, which urged him to go to the relief of his brethren in Egypt; and he did not venture to trust to any internal light on this subject, until it was authenticated, as the will of God, by the miraculous signs of the bush burning without being consumed, and the conversion of the rod into a serpent. Gideon's fleece is another instance of the same fact. And our Saviour himself claimed not to be the divinely sent Messiah upon the assurance of any inward light, invisible to others and inexplicable to himself, but upon the grounds of the *miracles* which he performed; and these were open, overt facts, — facts addressed to all the senses. "If," said he, "I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin." And again, "The same works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me." And, in like manner, "Though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in Him." And when the faithless Thomas would not give credence to the identity of Jesus after his resurrection, even on the evidence of sight, but demanded the confirmation of touch also, our Lord mildly, indeed; reproved him for his incredulity, but, nevertheless, afforded to him the additional proof that he required.

And now, to apply these remarks to the subject before us, if any claim to be the recipients of a

supernatural illumination, we may not only properly withhold our belief of this fact, but we are imperatively obliged to reject any such claim, until they will give sufficient proof that it is well founded. And as the only sufficient evidence of this is the exhibition of supernatural power, and as they will not, it is to be presumed, require of us to believe in *their* peculiar light on less decisive proof than the Prophets, our Saviour, and his Apostles gave, we may wait, before we admit their high pretension in this respect, until they show its reality, by curing the sick with a word, raising the dead, ruling the elements, or by doing some other "works," which none can do "unless the Father hath sent him." We solemnly maintain that we are at liberty, nay, that it is our imperious duty, without at all calling their veracity or sincerity in question, to determine for ourselves, whether it be not more probable that they are deceived in their belief of a supernatural influence of the spirit, than that a belief, which seems to us encumbered with insuperable difficulties, can be true. And we would conjure all serious inquirers on this subject to reflect how hazardous a thing it is to trust to mere internal convictions, which are independent of, and considered superior to, our rational faculties. What criterion have we, in such a case, by which we can distinguish true religion from superstition, wisdom from folly, truth from error, sense from nonsense? There is not a religious zealot in Christendom who feels himself more fully "conscious," more entirely "convinced," of his peculiar il-

lumination, than does the poor maniac, of the existence and reality of those images which are the creation of his own sick brain. And we cannot perceive why, on the principle maintained, the one has not the same right to insist on the strength of his convictions as the other. We would here cite an instance in point. Within the circle of our own daily walks, there is an aged female, who sees, that is, in her own belief sees, a celestial messenger or angel from heaven, with whom she converses, and holds delightful, and, to her, edifying communion, and this, too, every successive morning and night. Nothing can exceed the strength of her *conviction* on this subject. It is clear, full, perfect, and no earthly being can dispossess her of it; whilst in all things else she is perfectly rational. Now, if the mere *convictions* of a person in regard to any fact are to be taken as proof positive of the reality of the alleged fact, without further evidence, then this person is to be believed in regard to the undoubted *persuasion* of hers, though every one else perceives that it must be an instance of *monomania*, or partial insanity. And this example, too, may serve to illustrate the application and force of the argument above stated in reference to the alleged evidence of consciousness. This person is as "*conscious*" of the presence and communion of this heavenly visitant, as any individual ever was of a supernatural influence. But of what is she conscious? Of nothing but certain impressions on her mind, produced, as she believes, by the presence of an external object.

'That these impressions thus made are to be referred to a divine origin is an inference of her own; and it is one, which all, but herself, conclude to be the effect of a mind, so far as this particular circumstance is concerned, diseased and disordered.

Such are the consequences of the disuse and disavowal of our rational faculties in regard to the subject of Divine Influence, and of believing because we believe. What, in fact, but this very thing in regard to religion generally, has led to all the delusions and excesses of fanaticism and enthusiasm, which have so often and so deplorably disgraced the Christian name? "Every conceit," to quote again the authority of Locke, "that thoroughly warms our fancies, must pass for an inspiration, if there be nothing but the strength of our persuasions, whereby to judge of our persuasions; if *reason* must not examine their truth by something extrinsical to the persuasions themselves, inspirations and delusions, truth and falsehood, will have the same measure, and will not be possible to be distinguished." * Nor is this all. If mere persuasion, without proof, is a sufficient guide, then the more perfectly reason and common sense are silenced, the more perfect will the persuasion be, and, consequently, the more unquestioned its guidance, and the more certainly divine. Yet further; if the strength of persuasions, in themselves considered merely, be sufficient evidence of their truth, then

* Essay, Book iv., Chap. 19, § 14.

there is not a folly, or an extravagance, or an absurdity in opinion, of which men have been strongly persuaded, that is not true. And, as men have been equally persuaded of the truth of absurdities and extravagances which are directly opposed to each other, these opposite absurdities and extravagances are equally true. Until, then, some criterion or test is furnished, by which the alleged supernatural influence of the spirit is to be distinguished from the natural movements of the mind, as it is operated upon by countless motives, known and unknown, — and this, too, distinct from, and in addition to, the strong persuasion of the existence of this influence, — we are obliged to call in question, the reality of any such influence.

CHAPTER V.

Subject continued.

2. BUT we have only begun our objections to this doctrine of a supernatural influence upon the souls of men. Another is this. There are frequent instances of good and pious men, who give as full evidence as any persons can, whatever their speculative belief may be, that they are moved by the influences of God's spirit; who exhibit,

in their daily life, those Christian graces which are expressly declared by St. Paul to be the fruits of the spirit, namely, "goodness, righteousness, and truth;"* but who, nevertheless, assert that they are wholly unconscious of any such supernatural influences. Examples of this description are by no means rare. Our readers must be particularly unfortunate in their social relations not to know many such. And, when we take this fact in connexion with another, and one which we would state without invidiousness, that those who declare themselves to be the subjects of a supernatural influence are not always superior to those just mentioned, in those moral and religious qualities which are declared to be the Scriptural evidences of the spirit of God, but, on the contrary, are sometimes grossly wanting in them, the fair inference from these united facts seems to be, that the argument from *experience*, so far as it depends on *testimony*, labors for want of proof. For which is more rational, to believe that they who give the only Scriptural proof, namely, that of "fruits," of their being moved by a Divine Influence, are in an error; or that those, who give far less or no such proof of the supernatural presence of the spirit, are in an error?

3. And this naturally leads us to a third objection with which the doctrine under remark is fatally encumbered. Those who assert themselves to be thus supernaturally enlightened by the spirit

* Eph. v. 9. See also Gal. v. 22, 23.

of God, *and who have equal claims to be believed*, often take irreconcilably different views of the same subjects, and of those, also, which are of the highest import; such, for example, as the character of God; of Christ; of human nature; of the terms of pardon and acceptance of sinners. This is a notorious fact. But can we believe that the true spirit of God speaks a double language? that it inspires one man with one set of truths, and another man with a different one? Since, then, these alleged supernatural influences of the spirit lead to conclusions opposed to each other, and this is obviously the fact; since the evidence in one mind is as strong as the evidence in another; since none has a right to claim a preference with respect to his peculiar light; and since, yet further, there is no common criterion by which the claims of both are to be tested; must it not be, that endless and inextricable confusion must follow from the reception of this doctrine? Is, then, the spirit of God a spirit of discord? Can we admit that He gives a supernatural manifestation of Himself, which necessarily leads to interminable disputes?

4. We are constrained to reject this system of supernatural influences, because, in the fourth place, it is opposed to all that we know of God's moral government. Every thing that takes place in His providence is produced through the agency of means or second causes. "Not seldom; a long and circuitous train of them, the connexions and combinations of which it is not in our power to trace, conceals from our view the

spirit that guides, and the power that effects the whole. Nor is it only great events, and the accomplishment of great purposes, that we are to trace to the agency of the spirit of God. It extends not less to the common provisions and constant occurrences of life; to the food by which our life is supported, and every provision by which it is made comfortable. These are the gift of God; not directly, not independently of our exertions, nor without the exertions of others, but by employing them both. God is also the preserver of our lives, and is to be acknowledged in all the common as well as the uncommon exigencies of our being. Not, however, by immediate acts of power and a direct agency is this done, but by the instrumentality of an infinite variety and complicated system of means. Of these means, our own exertions, and the assistance of others, constitute an essential and a principal part. If they are neglected or withheld, the protecting care of Heaven is withheld. We perish. A miracle is not wrought to save him who takes no care to save himself." * But if God, in imparting His spiritual influence

"This quotation will be recognised as an extract from Dr. Ware's "Letters to Trinitarians and Calvinists." Letter VI., pp. 111, 112. Cambridge, 1820. We would take this opportunity of observing, that these Letters of Dr. Ware exhibit a model of the temper and spirit with which religious controversy should be conducted. The Letter above quoted may be cited as a specimen of the whole. The conscious, yet quiet, power, with which the argument of his opponent is examined, what is irrelevant in it laid aside, its just strength and point allowed, and then fairly met and answered, are truly admirable.

to the mind of man, acts without any such agency of means, in some indescribable, incomprehensible, and miraculous way, then it is an act of omnipotence, which is without a parallel in His whole universe besides. We deny not that a direct, or even miraculous, agency may be exerted, or that there may be circumstances which may require such an agency; but it is obviously without those characteristics which mark His doings in all things else; it is opposed to all those analogies which run through all His moral superintendence of man. And all this, moreover, is done, as we shall soon show, without any adequate call or cause, unnecessarily and gratuitously. Now we cannot but think that this view of the subject presents a valid objection to the doctrine under discussion. We must conclude that a system which involves such a departure from the usual course of God's providence, and this for no adequate, and even for no necessary and important, cause, should be received with much hesitation and doubt.

5. We cannot receive the doctrine of the supernatural influences of the spirit, because, in the fifth place, it supposes a miracle to be wrought in the minds of men, when no miracle is needed. It implies an altogether gratuitous use of Divine power. In the very constitution of our minds God has made provision, as we have already observed,* by which He can lead them to any result, by those influences to which in their natural

* See page 8, *et seq.*

operation they are or may be subjected. The provision, it will be remembered, is this:— The order in which ideas and emotions arise within us, and the circumstances which may give them vividness and intensity, are often wholly unknown to us. This order and these circumstances, therefore, may be altered or interrupted by the ordinary influence of God upon the mind, without our being conscious of the peculiar operation of this influence, and without our being able to discern it as working separately from the natural operations of the intellect, though, at the same time, we profit by its agency. If this be so, — and to deny it, is to deny one of the most obvious facts in the philosophy of the human mind, a fact of which any man may be assured by one moment's reflection, — if this be so, then is it not gratuitous to suppose that the miraculous influence of the spirit of God is necessary in the conversion of men from sin to holiness?—that He takes us, without any necessity for it, out of a moral dispensation of government, and puts us into a miraculous one?

6. We object to this doctrine of supernatural illumination, in the sixth place, because it renders unimportant, or useless, the ordinary means of improvement, which God, in His goodness, has put into our hands. What is the object of all the instruction of Nature, Providence, and of the Jewish and Gospel dispensations? What is the use of all the moral machinery which God established at first, which has been continued in operation through all ages, and is, at this moment,

producing its appointed results in every thing around us, and in us? Is it, or can it be, any other than the improvement of man's moral and religious nature; the advancement of that spiritual part of his being which shall bring him into a nearer likeness to God, and prepare him for the holiness and happiness of the eternal world? If this be not the design of these means, what are they designed for? But if this be their design, by the appointment of God, shall we venture to say, that they are not adequate, if faithfully and conscientiously employed, to accomplish their end? — that their most successful operation is yet a failure, unless aided by a supernatural influence, which, of course, no man can secure for himself, and which is independent of any agency of his? Yet it is to this extent that the system under consideration reaches; since the change to be wrought in us is not one which can be effected by the use of these means, but is expressly said* to be one totally different, not only "from every thing that natural men experience, in degree and circumstances, but also in *kind*, and is of a nature vastly more excellent." What a piece of solemn trifling, then, it is to offer motives and means of Christian improve-

* President Edwards. See p. 43. Dr. Wood also expressly asserts that the "special, the efficacious, and even the *supernatural* influence of the Spirit is concerned in regeneration." Letters to Dr. Ware, p. 215. And again (page 217), that "such an influence is necessary to overcome a strong and *total* opposition to holiness, and to effect a *new* moral creation."

ment to men, when they are so utterly ineffectual in accomplishing their object! What works of supererogation, how vain, how worthless, are our sabbaths and sanctuaries, our religious meetings, our instructions and prayers, and all the ordinary means of religious improvement! It is not enough, then, that God has given us hearts to feel, and minds to know; manifestations of Himself in His wondrous frame of nature; the lessons of His providence every day and every hour; and, more than all this, His blessed Gospel; the instructions and example of His Son; the aids of His good spirit to coöperate with all our good efforts!—All this is unavailing to lead us to Him in humble faith and childlike trust, until some strange, and unaccountable, and absolutely miraculous influence is communicated to the mind, in some equally strange, unaccountable, and miraculous way!

7. Our next objection to the doctrine under remark seems to us to be decisive, even though it stood alone. It is, that the *effects*, which are relied upon as proof of the supernatural illumination of the human mind by the spirit of God, may all be accounted for on principles strictly natural. It will here be seen that we meet the argument in favor of this doctrine on the ground where its advocates are most willing to place it. They confidently, and doubtless with entire honesty and self-conviction, appeal to the alleged effects of the Divine Influence, as being decisive evidence of its supernatural character. Now, if we can show, or make it appear probable, that

these effects have no just claim to this distinction, then this part of their argument will be found to be untenable.

We regret that our limits will not permit us to go into much detail on this part of the subject, since it is one of great practical importance in itself, and comprises the true explanation of all those mental phenomena which are thought to be miraculous.

Among those influences, whose effects, combined in various modes and degrees, exhibit the results which are considered to be supernatural, are the following:— That peculiar constitution of body called Temperament, by which persons are predisposed to be gloomy, timid, mystical, austere, ascetic, liable to great excitement and great depressions of feeling, without any adequate cause;— Education, in its broadest sense, including the education of circumstances, the unsuspected influence of parents, relatives, friends, and associates, and the moral and religious atmosphere which is habitually breathed; and Education, in its stricter sense of direct instruction, including the lessons at a mother's knee, at the school, at the college, the tasks that are studied, the books that are read, and all the specific means of moral suasion;— the power of strong Belief to create, so far as almost any mere state of mind is concerned, the thing believed;— Imagination, with all its transforming power, especially when it is excited, for the first time, by religion apprehended as a reality, and associated with sensible images of the future destiny of the

undying soul ; — the countless influences of Association, by which, we know not why or how, certain places, persons, times, and events appear to be fraught with a mysterious interest and an inexplicable connexion ; — the strange and unexpected concurrence of Circumstances, which, by an agency not our own, lead to some deeply affecting result ; — Peculiarities of the individual, which make him, or seem to make him, an exception to all known laws ; — the unsuspected influence of an Impatience of being thought less susceptible than others ; — those Frauds, pious and impious, which we are always liable to practise on ourselves, where deep feeling, religious or not, is concerned ; — all these, and various other causes purely natural, but which it cannot be necessary further to enumerate, will be found to produce, or enter into, or affect, those mental states, which are generally believed to be the result of an immediate supernatural effluence of the spirit of God. And when we take into view the *Means*, which with such devoted and skilful zeal are frequently used to effect this desired change in the mind ; — such as the continual Solicitations ; the earnest and impassioned Appeals which are directed to the imagination and the passions ; the Prayers, Tears, and beseeching Looks of anxious friends ; the use that is always made of that natural Sympathy which darts, like the electric fire, through crowds of those who are assembled for a common object, and which makes each experience the concentrated emotions of all ; the more than scenical Artifice, shocking as

the thought is, and the elaborate Arrangement, we had almost said, the Trick of Arrangements, which are used, doubtless with the best intentions, but still used, to affect the mind in a certain prescribed way;— when we consider, further, the nature of those *Doctrines* which are commonly associated with that of a supernatural change, and how appalling they must be to a mind which receives them as scriptural truth;— when, in fine, we recollect that there are always some persons, upon whom these influences may be brought to bear with a peculiar force, such, for example, as those, who from their natural openness to Impression, or from the effects of Disease, or from a consciousness of Guilt, which is a much more deeply seated and more widely spread sentiment of our nature than is ordinarily supposed; or who, from Self-dissatisfaction, or a feeling of spiritual Insecurity, or an earnest desire of spiritual Advancement, or a yearning after Pardon, and Hope, and Help from on high, or from any other exciting cause, are predisposed to be powerfully affected;— we can have, we think, but little difficulty in tracing the change, which is thought to be produced by the supernatural influences of God upon the human mind, to causes strictly natural. The wonder is,— not that confessedly great effects are produced,— but that they are not more frequent, and more tremendous and overwhelming. What reason is there, then, for considering these results as being out of the ordinary course of nature? What warrant is there in reason or in revelation to multiply miracles with-

out a cause? And, since it was just now shown that as the manner in which the spirit operates upon the mind does not necessarily imply that it should be supernatural, so, from considering the effects produced, we see no reason for concluding that they are, in fact, supernatural, — what ground is there for believing that any supernatural influence of Divine power whatever is exerted in the production of the alleged effect?

CHAPTER VI.

Subject continued. Conversion of Bunyan.

IT may not, perhaps, be necessary, but, that we may illustrate yet more clearly our view of this subject, we shall proceed to show the application of the principles here laid down to the explanation of one or two individual cases of alleged supernatural illumination; and, for this purpose, we shall select those which are the most authentic and unquestioned.

We suppose that the case of JOHN BUNYAN, author of "The Pilgrim's Progress," will be admitted to be one of the most signal of this description. But, if we look narrowly into the history of his inward "experiences," as he himself has recorded them, we shall find little proof

of their supernatural character, and shall be led to conclude that he was only, as his biographer, Southey, calls him, a "glorious dreamer," after all. We shall trace, in a few words, the religious changes of his mind; and, in doing this, shall use, as far as possible, his own strong and descriptive language.

He was born under circumstances extremely unpropitious to all moral and mental culture. He was, he tells us, "of a low, inconsiderable generation; my father's house being of that rank that is meanest and most despised of all the families of the land."* He learnt, indeed, "according to the rate of other poor men's children, but soon lost the little that he had been taught even almost utterly." His mind was of the most susceptible, enthusiastic, imaginative, and superstitious cast. In his very boyhood he was beset by horrible visions by night, and dreadfully compunctious visitings by day. "When I was but a child," he tells us, "but nine or ten years old, these did so distress my soul, that, in the midst of my many sports and childish vanities, amidst my vain companions, I was then so overcome with despair of life and heaven, that I should often wish, either that there had been no hell, or that I had been a devil; supposing they were only tormentors; that, if it must needs be that I went thither, I might rather be a tormentor, than be tormented myself."

* We quote from the "Life of John Bunyan," prefixed by Southey to his splendid edition of "The Pilgrim's Progress." 8vo. London. 1830.

As he approached maturer years, he met with some providential escapes from death, which, in the retrospect, after his mind had received a more decidedly religious tone, solemnly affected him. He was married, probably before he was nineteen, to a woman who seems to have been of a kindred spirit; and the reading with her of the "Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven," and the Bishop of Bangor's "Practice of Piety," served to deepen his religious impressions. The principles of veneration and awe, which, throughout, were distinctive characteristics of Bunyan's mind, were, about this time, strongly developed, and, in consequence of his extreme ignorance, degenerated into the most ridiculous superstitions. "The high place, priest, clerk, vestment, service, and what else belonging to the church," filled him with profound reverence, and "he could have laid down at the feet of a priest and been trampled upon by them, their name, their garb, and work did so intoxicate and bewitch" him. The unsoundness and nervous debility of his mind at this period are obvious from a variety of anecdotes. We cannot stop, and have no desire, to relate them, and shall merely make such a reference to them as may be necessary for our present purpose. Thus, while engaged one Sunday, in a noisy sport, it seemed to him as if a voice from heaven suddenly darted into his soul, and said, "Wilt thou leave thy sins, and go to heaven? or have thy sins, and go to hell?" "At this," he continues, "I was put to an exceeding maze; and was as if I had with the eyes of my under-

derstanding seen the Lord Jesus looking down upon me, as being very hotly displeased with me." It happened, "about this time, as he stood at a neighbour's shop-window, cursing, and swearing, and playing the heathen, after his wonted manner," that the reproof of a dissolute woman, on account of his profaneness, so impressed him, that he ever afterwards relinquished this sin. His childish love of bell-ringing, for which his conscience rebuked him; and his yet more childish fears, that, in consequence of merely going to look at the ringers, one of the bells would fall upon him directly; or that it would hit him by a rebound, in its descent, as he was sheltering himself under a beam; or that, finally, the steeple itself, bells and all, as he stood in the door-way, would fall upon him, as a judicial punishment for his sinful and presumptuous hankering after this vain practice of bell-ringing, — are examples of the diseased condition of his nervous system, and the highly excitable state of his feelings.

We recount these things merely to show the spiritual idiosyncrasies of Bunyan's mind. We profess ourselves admirers of his genius, and think, with his biographer, Southey, that his "character would be imperfectly understood, and could not be justly appreciated, if this part of his history were kept out of sight. To respect him as he deserves, to admire him as he ought to be admired, it is necessary that we should be informed, not only of the coarseness and brutality of his youth, but of the extreme ignorance out

of which he worked his way, and the stage of burning enthusiasm through which he passed, — a passage not less terrible than that of his own Pilgrim in “the Valley of the Shadow of Death.”

The circumstances, by which this enthusiastic stage of his progress was marked, we cannot now particularly dwell upon. It seems to us of very little importance what they were. The balance of his mind, at no time well poised, was now almost entirely destroyed. Bunyan never, but imperfectly, possessed the power of distinguishing what was purely imaginary in the various states of his mind from what was real; and, in the dreadful mental conflicts which now awaited him, he possessed this power less than ever. His first notion of a “new birth,” and its kindred doctrines, seems to have been derived from the talk of some “poor women,” which he overheard, as he was “tinkering in the streets of Bedford.” “They were to me,” he says, “as if they had found a new world, as if they were people that dwelt alone, and were not to be reckoned among their neighbours.” He now read the Bible with “new eyes.” He began to take delight in St. Paul’s Epistles, which, “before, he could not away with.” He was “put to his plunge” in regard to the question, whether he had faith or not, and believed the only way in which he could be certified of this was by working a miracle. In this, as we have shown above, his inference from his principles was consecutive and rational. He was, however, withholden from trying the experiment by the equally rational

fear that he should fail; and if so, "then, to be sure, he had no faith, but was a castaway and lost." He had now a vision, in which the happiness of the sanctified was presented to him, and in this we perceive the seminal principle of "The Pilgrim's Progress." He was next driven to the very verge of madness by doubts concerning his being one of "the elect." But, while he was even "giving up the ghost of all his hopes," he was encouraged by a text from Scripture, which suddenly occurred to him. Then a fear arose, "whether the day of grace were not past." "What," said he, "if the good people of Bedford who were already converted were all that were to be saved in those parts?" A very rational inquiry, indeed, for one who believed in "special grace," as he did. But he was again comforted by a passage of Scripture, which occurred under singular circumstances. Then came another and a sadder fear. It was a doubt whether he was "called." He found new depths of corruption in his wicked heart. "Sin," he says, "would as naturally bubble out of it as water from a fountain." "I was sorry that God had made me man." But now the dawn of a more permanent comfort began to appear. From this deep distress and anguish he was relieved in a very singular manner. It was by a sermon on the text from *Solomon's Song*, "Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair." This recurred again and again, twenty times together, to his mind. "Then," says he, "I began to give place to the Word,—and now I could be-

lieve that my sins should be forgiven me." "Surely, I will not forget this, forty years hence. But alas! within less than forty days I began to question all again."

We must excuse ourselves from following, with much particularity, these mournful details of the rush and subsidence of over-excited feelings, — these deplorable aberrations of a mind in many respects eminently gifted. He heard, subsequently, what he deemed to be a supernatural voice. He thought himself to be possessed by the devil; "he was bound in the wings of temptation, and the wind would carry him away." He felt "the enemy behind him, pulling his clothes." He was taught by his minister, Mr. Gifford, that his belief must be confirmed by a particular revelation from heaven, and this he at length persuaded himself that he had received. But, in the midst of these celestial evidences of the reality of his faith, he had a more fearful trial still, and most fearfully does he describe it. It was a suggestion of the "Tempter" to "sell Christ"; to this, after a horrible conflict for a year, he believed himself to have yielded; "and down fell I, as a bird that is shot from the top of a tree, into great guilt and fearful despair." From this he was relieved by a "noise of wind" upon him, speaking, as in an articulate voice, a comforting passage of the Bible. In three days, however, he began to despair, and was again comforted by what he deemed to be an unearthly voice; and when this "supportation," as he calls it, began to fail, on having recourse to

prayer, the words, like an echo, returned upon him, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." In such conflicts, to use his own language, "Peace would be in and out, sometimes twenty times a day; comfort now, and trouble presently; peace now, and before I could go a furlong, as full of fears and guilt as ever heart could hold." And, finally, to close this melancholy history, after praying for a direct sign from heaven, and having, as he thought, received it, by the "*breaking in upon his mind* of a certain text of Scripture, he was then as though he had seen the Lord look down from heaven upon him, through the tiles." "And now remained only the hinder part of the tempest; for the thunder was gone past; only some drops did still remain." And when, one day, in a field, he was thinking of the words, "Thy righteousness is in heaven," "Methought withal," he says, "I saw, with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand, there, I say, as my righteousness." "Then his chains fell off in very deed;" and, though not wholly freed from subsequent doubts and difficulties, "he was loosed from his affliction, and his temptation fled away."

Such was the alleged supernatural illumination of JOHN BUNYAN. It is an authentic account; for, in all its leading facts and circumstances, it has been derived from himself, and is here given chiefly in his own words. We wish now to try the force of our argument by an application of it to his case. If, then, the mere conviction or persuasion of the mind, the mere belief of any

fact, independently of all the usual sources of evidence, is to be received as sufficient proof of the reality of that fact, then we are bound to suppose that the mind of Bunyan was supernaturally illuminated; since no man was ever more thoroughly convinced of this than he, and there is no man, who, on account of entire probity, conscientiousness, sanity, and sound sense on all other subjects, is more worthy of credit.

But if, on the other hand, we are authorized to examine this case by those rules of evidence, and those principles of investigation, which govern us in ascertaining the truth of all other alleged facts, we think there will be little need of resorting to this violent supposition of a miraculous agency in accounting for the peculiar state of Bunyan's mind. His temperament was naturally extremely nervous and morbidly excitable. His conscience was so tremblingly alive, that he was continually accusing himself of sins, of which, in a more healthy state of the intellect, he must have known he was guiltless. Veneration, reverence, and the allied sentiments, which connect the soul with the unseen, the future, and the eternal, were very early and fully developed; but, in consequence of his utter ignorance, and his habitual sense of guilt, they degenerated into superstition at once the most ridiculous and lamentable. The circumstances of his life all tended to inflame and exasperate these natural defects; while the reflective powers, by which alone they could have been neutralized and controlled, remained comparatively inert. He lived in an age,

"in which hypocrisy was regnant, and fanaticism rampant throughout the land." And, finally, to stamp and seal the religious character of his mind, he became a convert to views of Christian faith, which were peculiarly adapted to fix and fill his sensitive, guilt-stricken, and highly imaginative mind. These views recognised, as a distinctive principle of belief, the doctrine of immediate revelations from heaven; and receiving this, as he did, with an undoubting faith, is it strange that he should seem to himself to realize what he thus believed to be true? He lost, at times, if, indeed, he ever possessed, — as is obvious to every reader of his life, and as his most intelligent biographer asserts, and as he himself confessed, — the power of distinguishing things real from things imagined, or things *objectively*, from things *subjectively*, true; and is it wonderful that he should think he perceived what had no existence but in his own vivid and creative fancy; and that the visions thus bodied forth should take the "form and pressure" of the images preëxisting in his own mind? We hold, then, that Bunyan, so far as these miraculous impressions and communications are concerned, *is not to be believed*. Sincere and self-convinced, without doubt, he was. We call not his veracity in question; and we think he was peculiarly free from that unfortunate mixture, that spiritual *amalgam* of fraud, half-sincerity, self-deception, pride, hatred, and the kindred brood of malignant feelings, which ordinarily go to make up the vulgar fanatic; — still we maintain that it is competent

for us to go beyond the record of his "experiences," and look into the causes which produced them. And if we do, we shall find no reason, nor, as we think, the least authority, for believing that they were the results of any causes but those which were purely and strictly natural.

CHAPTER VII.

Subject continued. Conversion of Jonathan Edwards.

WE intended, in like manner, to analyze the alleged spiritual illuminations of *Newton*, the well known friend of Cowper, and to him the most unfortunate of intimates; of *Wesley*; and of *Whitefield*. But we suppose it cannot be necessary; and our limits do not admit of such a detailed and minute examination as would be deemed fair and necessary by those who have any doubts on this subject. But there is one other example which has peculiar claims upon our notice, since it is that of a man eminently distinguished for powers of logical analysis and acuteness of reasoning; of high and unquestioned authority in these matters, even to the present day; and one of the ablest advocates of the doctrine we impugn. We scarcely need add that we refer to JONATHAN EDWARDS.

The first traits that present themselves to us, in contemplating the character of President Edwards, are an exceeding susceptibility to religious impressions, and a great tenderness and scrupulosity of conscience. These discovered themselves in very early life, and marked his whole subsequent career. "I had," says he, "a variety of concerns and exercises about my soul, from my childhood; but had two more remarkable seasons of awakening, before I met with that change by which I was brought to those new dispositions and that new sense of things, that I have since had. The first time when I was a boy, some years before I went to college, at a time of remarkable awakening in my father's congregation." * As he entered college when he was about twelve years of age, his first "season of awakening" must have been in his very boyhood, "some years" before, probably when he was seven or eight years of age. "I was then very much affected for many months, and concerned about the things of religion and my soul's salvation." "I was abundant in duties," prayed "five times a day in secret," and "spent much time in religious talk with other boys." "I built

* "Life of President Edwards," prefixed to the edition of his works to which we have referred above, Section III., entitled "Some Account of his Conversion, Experience, and Religious Exercises, written by Himself." This has been republished, as a tract, by the American Tract Society, and is held in great repute by the large denomination of Christians to which Edwards professedly belonged.

a booth in a swamp, in a very retired spot, for a place of prayer ;” and “ besides had particular secret places of my own in the wood, where I used to retire by myself, and was from time to time much affected. My affections seemed to be lively, and easily moved, and I seemed to be in my element when engaged in religious duties.” But he backslided from this, and became “ at times very uneasy,” when, towards the close of his college life, he tells us, “ it pleased God to seize me with pleurisy, in which he brought me nigh to the grave, and shook me over the brink of hell ;” and he “ was thus brought to seek salvation in a manner that he never was before.” His “ Resolutions,” which were formed, probably, when he was about twenty years old, exhibit in a still greater degree, perhaps, than these extracts from the “ Account of his Conversion written by Himself,” the same proofs of exceeding openness to impression, mental conflicts, and scrupulousness on the subject of religion.

The circumstances of his life and education are next to be adverted to ; and they will be found, taken in connexion with these peculiarities of his mind, to come in aid of that state of his spiritual being which he deemed to be supernatural. His father was a clergyman, and by profession a rigid Calvinist, in that sense of the term which it bore a century ago ; and he himself was brought up, and lived, and moved, and had his being, amidst “ the most straitest sect of this religion.” He seems to have *imbibed* this system of faith in his earliest years, and to have

been thoroughly imbued with its peculiarities. And, notwithstanding the assertion of his biographer, that he did not "confine himself, in his religious inquiries, to authors of any particular sect or denomination," we think it is very apparent from his own account of his religious experience, that his mind was too much preoccupied with the faith of his childhood, to give to any other system a fair and thorough examination. This is to be inferred from the fact, that, while he was continually exercised in strong inward strugglings, in the application of his peculiar form of belief to his own spiritual state, he seems never to have questioned its divine origin, or to have doubted whether it were really taught in the Bible. And how he disposed of the difficulties with which his system of belief is encumbered, when they did present themselves to his mind, may be inferred from the following statement:—

"From my childhood up," says he, "my mind had been full of objections against the doctrine of God's Sovereignty, in choosing whom he would to eternal life, and rejecting whom he pleased; leaving them eternally to perish, and be everlastingly tormented in hell. It used to appear a horrible doctrine to me."

And how was a mind so astute, so discriminative, and so discursive, in a logical sense, as his, in regard to many other topics of inquiry, finally satisfied in respect to this apparently "horrible doctrine"? By research?—by comparing Scripture with itself?—by any new light from the inspired volume?—by argument?—by the dis-

covery of any intermediate trains of thought, which before lay hidden?—by any of the rational or ordinary means of resolving doubts of this kind? No, there appears to be nothing of all this. His own account of the process is the following:—“But I remember the time very well, when I seemed to be convinced and fully satisfied as to this sovereignty of God, and His justice in thus disposing of men according to His sovereign pleasure; *but never could give an account how, or by what means, I was thus convinced.*” And, after more than intimating that he ascribed this change to the “extraordinary influence of the Spirit of God,” he goes on to observe, —“However, my mind rested in it;” and “there has been a wonderful alteration in my mind with respect to the doctrine of God’s sovereignty from that day to this.” “The doctrine has very often appeared exceeding pleasant, bright, and sweet.” Thus, according to his own showing, he became reconciled to a view of the divine government, “to which his mind, from his childhood up, had been full of objections,” without being able to “give an account how, or by what means,” this change was wrought. We deem this a remarkable instance of the effect of early associations and influences in producing an implicit belief, and also of the power of this belief to reconcile the mind to objections and difficulties, which, in respect to any other subject, would have appeared insuperable.*

* It may be worthy of remark, in showing the singular

Again, the mind of President Edwards, acute and penetrating as it was in metaphysical researches, was singularly dreamy and imaginative on the subject of religion. And this natural tendency was much aided by his physical constitution and habits of life. "He possessed," says the biographer above quoted, "but a comparatively small stock of animal life; his spirits were low." He passed the greater part of his time alone. He is said to have "commonly spent thirteen hours every day in his study." His usual relaxation, that was called specifically by this name, was a ride "to some lonely grove, where he would dismount and walk awhile." In further proof of this prevailing cast of his mind, we refer to his "Account of his own Conversion." It is fraught with descriptions of his solitary musings, visions, despondencies, and raptures. We shall quote a few passages in illustration of this.

"I spent," says he, "most of my time in thinking of divine things, year after year; often walking alone in the woods, and solitary places, for meditation, soliloquy, and prayer, and converse with God; and it was always my manner at such times to sing forth my contemplations."

state of Edwards's mind in regard to the "sovereignty of God," that, after declaring as above, (page 33d of his "Conversion," in the volume before quoted,) namely, that it "appeared as a horrible doctrine to me," he says, on page 41st of the same account, in apparent forgetfulness of what he had thus before stated, "God's sovereignty has ever appeared to me great part of his glory."

Again; "Once as I rode out into the woods, for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view, that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure, and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace, that appeared so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. The *person* of Christ appeared ineffably excellent, with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception; which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour; which kept me, the greater part of the time, in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust and to be full of Christ alone. I have, several other times, had views very much of the same nature, and which have had the same effects."

On another occasion, he tells us, — "An inward, sweet sense of these things at times came into my heart; and my soul was led away in pleasant views and contemplations of them. And my mind was greatly engaged to spend my time in reading and meditating on Christ, on the beauty and excellency of his *person*, and the lovely way of salvation by free grace in him. I found no books so delightful to me as those that treated of these subjects. These words, *Canti-*

cles ii. 1, used to be abundantly with me, '*I am the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the valleys.*' These words seemed to me sweetly to represent the *loveliness and beauty of Jesus Christ*. The whole book of *Canticles* used to be pleasant to me, and I used to be much in reading it, about that time; and found, from time to time, an inward sweetness, that would carry me away, in my contemplations. This I know not how to express otherwise than by a calm, sweet abstraction of soul from all concerns of this world; and sometimes a *kind of vision, or fixed ideas and imaginations*, of being alone in the mountains, or some solitary wilderness, far from all mankind, sweetly conversing with Christ, and wrapt and swallowed up in God. The sense I had of divine things would often of a sudden kindle up, as it were, a sweet burning in my heart, an ardor of soul that I know not how to express."

We hope we shall offend no serious mind by considering this as an excited daydream; or by denominating a mind, which could thus find in *Solomon's Song* the occasion and nurture of such raptures, a highly dreamy and imaginative one.

We make one other extract, not merely in illustration of the same fact, but on account of what has always seemed to us its affecting beauty of expression.

"Holiness, as I then wrote down some of my contemplations on it, appeared to me to be of a sweet, pleasant, charming, serene, calm nature, which brought an inexpressible purity, brightness, peacefulness, and ravishment to the soul. In

other words, that it made the soul like a field or garden of God, with all manner of pleasant flowers; all pleasant, delightful, and undisturbed; enjoying a sweet calm, and the gently vivifying beams of the sun. The soul of a true Christian, as I then wrote my meditations, appeared like such a little white flower as we see in the spring of the year; low and humble on the ground; opening its bosom to receive the pleasant beams of the sun's glory; rejoicing, as it were, in a calm rapture; diffusing around a sweet fragranc; standing peacefully and lovingly in the midst of other flowers round about; all, in like manner, opening their bosoms to drink in the light of the sun. There was no part of *creature* holiness, that I had so great a sense of its loveliness, as humility, brokenness of heart, and poverty of spirit; and there was nothing I so earnestly longed for. My heart panted after this, to lie before God, as in the dust; that I might be nothing, and that God might be ALL; that I might become as a little child."

In justice to our subject, we are constrained to go one step further in analyzing the alleged supernatural conversion of President Edwards, and observe, that in every thing relating to his own religious experience the balance of his mind appears to have been destroyed. The traits already referred to seem to us plainly to indicate this; and that to which we now allude is, as we think, to be taken in further confirmation of the fact. We refer to the estimate he made of his own moral and religious condition. It is matter

of notoriety what his character as a Christian really was. Differing as we do from him in religious opinions, it taxes not our own charity, in the least, to bear our testimony to the truth, that, if there ever was an earnest, single-minded, devoted follower of his Lord and Master, here on the earth, it was President Edwards. What, then, shall we think of his power of moral and religious discrimination; what, may we ask, shall we think of the *sanity* of his mind on this particular subject; when we find him deliberately writing and leaving on record such statements as the following?

“It has often appeared to me, that if God should mark iniquity against me, I should appear the very worst of mankind, of all that have been since the beginning of the world to this time; and that I should have by far the lowest place in hell.”

“My wickedness, as I am in myself, has long appeared to me perfectly ineffable, and swallowing up all thought and imagination, like an infinite deluge, or mountains over my head. I know not how to express better what my sins appear to me to be, than by heaping infinite upon infinite, and multiplying infinite by infinite. Very often, for these many years, these expressions are in my mind, and in my mouth. Infinite upon infinite! Infinite upon infinite! When I look into my heart, and take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell.” And, after further amplifying the thought, he goes on to say, “And yet it seems to me, that my con-

viction of sin is exceeding small and faint; it is enough to amaze me that I have no more sense of my sin." We are to bear in mind, too, that these things were written *after* his "conversion" had taken place.

We do not deem it to be necessary to pursue this analysis of the structure and tendencies of the mind of President Edwards any further, in order to show that there was nothing extraordinary, still less nothing miraculous, in what he considered his conversion. His extreme sensitiveness on the subject of religion, and his scrupulosity of conscience, from his earliest years; his strong and vivid imagination; the circumstances and influences of the education to which he was subjected; the preoccupation of his mind, in consequence, with a system of faith, which prescribes a certain state of the feelings and affections as essential to salvation; the power inherent in such a faith to produce in such a mind the results desired; his extremely retired course of life; his habitual musings, rapt reveries, and lonely self-communion; — all these circumstances, taken in connexion with his "small stock of animal life," and prevailing "low tone of spirits," will be quite sufficient, we apprehend, to account for his peculiar state of mind and feeling, without resorting to the violent supposition of a miracle. To us, this result in which he rested, as the effect of a special and divine agency, not only appears easy and natural, but, in the ordinary course of things, inevitable.

We take leave of this important part of the

subject, by observing, that what has thus been shown in reference to the cases of Bunyan and Edwards can, as we believe, in like manner, be shown in regard to any other instance of conversion by an alleged supernatural influence. We have selected these as being notorious; and we are confident, that, 'in any similar case, if we could make a tolerably accurate analysis of those peculiar states of mind deemed to be miraculous, viewed in connexion with those influences by which they have been produced, we should find that there is nothing in them that has any claims to a supernatural or even to any very remarkable character.

CHAPTER VIII.

Subject continued, and concluded. Objections from Scripture, and from the Effects of the Doctrine.

8. OUR next objection to the doctrine under remark is, that it has no support in the instructions of Scripture. We do not mean by this, that no miraculous illumination is spoken of, or promised, in the New Testament. But we do maintain, that, when it is spoken of, or promised, it was confined to the Apostles, or to those to whom they imparted it; and not, in like manner, promised to Christians of all subsequent ages. We hold that this supernatural agency or

influence was given to meet a certain emergence, a particular case, and that, when this object was fulfilled, the agency or influence ceased. And we hold further, what all qualified to judge on this subject will admit, that it is offending against all rational and acknowledged laws of Scriptural criticism, to extend a promise, which had only an immediate application, and a local and temporary fulfilment, to all times, and to all ages. This, as we have had occasion more than once to say, is a point, which, strange as it may seem, has been almost wholly overlooked by the advocates of a supernatural influence of the spirit; and it is to this circumstance, more, perhaps, than to any other, that the wide-spread and tenaciously rooted errors on this subject are to be ascribed. Edwards places his Scriptural proof of the supernatural character of spiritual illumination, in modern times, distinctly and avowedly on the ground, that such an illumination was given to persons whose history is written in the Old and New Testaments.* And he is followed in this by all the leading authorities on this point, down to this day.† It is obvious, that a full elucidation of the position here taken would require an accurate

* See particularly pages 60, 61.

† One of the latest of these is Jonathan Dymond, a thinker and writer, for whom, on many accounts, we entertain a high respect. His language is, "Besides, there is not the most remote indication in the Christian Scriptures that this instruction [including, as is evident from his quotation, the miraculous agency of the holy spirit] would not be perpetual; and their silence on such a subject, a

examination of all those texts in which a divine aid is spoken of, or implied, throughout the New Testament. This comports neither with the design, nor the limits, of this Essay. We must, therefore, content ourselves with a general reference to these passages of Scripture. But, we think, no unprejudiced inquirer can fail to perceive, that, in all cases, where a supernatural influence is spoken of or implied, it is to be restricted, *by the circumstances of the case*, to persons and objects which have no parallel in subsequent times. We shall, however, for the purpose of showing the necessary tendency of this inquiry, and of making our meaning more fully understood, here advert to some of the more important of these circumstances, and illustrate the whole bearing of these remarks, by a single example.

1. Thus, for instance, the miraculous illumination of the spirit, which was imparted to the Apostles, and, by their agency, to their earliest converts, was to authenticate the divine original of Christianity. This has now been done, and

subject involving the most sacred privileges of our race, must surely be regarded as positive evidence that this instruction would be accorded to us for ever." Whether or not this "instruction" were not necessarily limited by its peculiar nature and objects is left for the consideration of every inquirer. It is also evident, from the nature of Mr. Dymond's remarks, that this divine instruction, whatever were its peculiar character, was, in his opinion, the same with that afforded to the prophets of old. Was there, then, no new effusion or manifestation of the spirit on the day of Pentecost, and subsequently?

a miraculous aid, for this purpose, is no longer needed.

2. In furtherance of this general end, it was necessary that the Apostles, for the satisfaction both of their own minds, and of those persons to whom they were sent, should not only *receive* supernatural illumination from God, but that they, themselves, should also be *assured* of this fact. Otherwise their teachings would rest merely on their own, that is, on human authority. But it is obvious, that, in these respects, the office and circumstances of the Apostles, and their first disciples, were peculiar, and that nothing can be inferred from them, in reference to the later periods of the church.

3. This divine assistance was originally given to the first heralds of the Gospel, not in accordance with the wishes or efforts of the individuals; but they spoke and acted as they were moved by the holy spirit. They appear to have been entirely passive in the reception of this miraculous influence. But under the Gospel dispensation, now that it is established, man is not permitted to consider himself as a passive recipient, merely, of any heavenly gift; but is called upon to seek, to ask, to toil, to coöperate with his own best endeavours, to render available to his own benefit the provisions of a Divine Beneficence. He may only hope for aid in furtherance of his own endeavours, and not a boon, by which self-exertion may be dispensed with.

4. These miraculous gifts appear to have been promiscuously imparted to the first converts to

Christianity, without reference to their previous character. Can they, in like manner, be expected to be promiscuously imparted in these later times?

5. Now that Christianity is established, the only assignable purpose of divine illumination is the religious progress, the improvement, in one word, the sanctification, of the individual. This illumination, in the time of the Apostles, was so little connected with the character of the individual, that we are expressly told, that many, who possessed it in an eminent degree, should not be partakers of the salvation they made known.

On all these accounts, it seems to us that a clear and palpable distinction is to be taken between the character and condition of the first heralds and converts of Christianity, and its professors in subsequent times; so that it is wholly irrational and indefensible, to infer that what is applied to the one should also be ascribed to the other.*

In further illustration of these remarks we shall cite a single example. And we shall take one which is very often quoted by the advocates of a supernatural influence in the conversion of man to holiness, in what are called "revivals" at the present day.† It is the divine illumina-

* We refer the reader, for a fuller examination of the differences between "The Ordinary and Extraordinary Operations of the Holy Spirit," to an Essay, thus entitled, by Thomas Ludlow, A. M. Lond. 8vo. 1797.

† Thus, in the "Lectures on Revivals of Religion, by William B. Sprague, D. D.," before quoted, the author (p. 2) considers "the wonderful effects of the Holy Ghost

tion imparted to the hearers of St. Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost.

On this occasion the Apostles of our Lord were present in a certain spot, by his direction, and for a certain specified object. They were, then and there, to be furnished with an especial power, from on high, to enable them to become the promulgators of a new religion. The presence of a supernatural power was authenticated by an open, visible, palpable miracle. The multitudes, on witnessing this miracle, "were all amazed and marvelled." Peter, availing himself of this roused and excited state of their minds, showed to them, from their own sacred books, that it was Jesus, whom they had crucified, who, "being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the holy spirit, hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." This fact being thus authenticated, they could no longer resist its evidence, and three thousand, on the same day, renounced their Jewish faith, and were baptized into the religion of Christ. These are the substantial facts in the case. But, in no single one of these particulars, is there any thing parallel or even analogous in those modern excitements which are now called "revivals of religion." There is not a

on the day of Pentecost," and those "movements" which, in these latter days, we are accustomed to denominate *revivals of religion*, as pointed out, by the same prediction of the Prophet Isaiah. The same position is again taken p. 24, and, indeed, repeatedly, throughout the book.

particle of proof that the miraculous agency was imparted, on this occasion, to any but the Apostles of our Lord. This influence, as we have said, was indicated by a palpable, outright sign, for a specific object. The change wrought in the minds of others was a change from the faith they had hitherto held to a faith in Christianity, and not a "change of heart" merely; and it was not owing to any supernatural influence exerted upon their minds, but was a natural effect of the calm, solid, convincing argument of Peter on the facts there presented to their minds. And, finally, the whole drift of this appeal was totally different from those which are vehemently urged in the production of modern "revivals;" since it was, that Jesus, "*a man approved by God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you,*" He "hath made both Lord and Christ." We cannot but be astonished, therefore, at that hardihood of assertion, which attempts to authorize or palliate these modern movements, by a reference to the transactions of the day of Pentecost. And we conclude this topic by stating, what no one, authorized to judge on this subject, and whose mind is not trammelled by his preconceived opinions, will venture to deny, that there is not the least authority for supposing that the supernatural or miraculous era of our religion extended an hour beyond the Apostolic age; but that it ceased when the great object, for which it was appointed, was secured, namely, the *establishment* of the religion of Jesus in the world;

and that to expect, on any Scriptural authority, any supernatural interposition now, in the conversion of the soul to God, is an indication of strong delusion and of gross fanaticism.

There is one other general remark on the language of Scripture, in reference to this subject, which is too important to be wholly omitted, but which, for the reasons already assigned, we cannot stop to illustrate at length. It is, that, while the language is highly figurative, by which the spiritual change from sin to holiness is spoken of, it also contains two distinct thoughts;—first, that this change is very great and obvious; and, second, that it is effected in entire harmony and congruity with the natural powers of man. Thus it is compared to the flowing of a fountain; to the opening of the deaf ear; to the gift of sight to the blind eye; to the upspringing of hitherto inert seed; and to the progress of the wind, which is known only by its effects. And, to adduce the most remarkable of all these emblems, this spiritual change is compared to a “new birth,” and resurrection from the dead. In all this it is plainly implied that a divine agency is the source of the change; that this change is great; but that, nevertheless, it is one which is in perfect agreement with the preëxisting nature of man; since it is only a new principle of vitality that is imparted, and not an essential change in his natural powers and capacities. Our spiritual nature is quickened, and endued with new life, and not another and a different nature given.

9. Our concluding objection to the doctrine of

a supernatural illumination of the spirit, at the present day, is derived from the natural and necessary *Effects* of the doctrine. These will, of course, differ according to the peculiar character of the mind which adopts it. Those, who have persuaded themselves that they have been the subjects of this supernatural illumination, will naturally, if not necessarily, be tempted to indulge in spiritual pride; to claim an irreverent alliance and communion with the Deity; and to arrogate to themselves an unwarranted superiority over those who, they may choose to think, are less favored than themselves with divine communications. — Those, on the other hand, who are more susceptible, timid, and self-distrustful, will find it difficult to realize that such a heavenly boon as this can be communicated to such as they; and pass life in hopeless despondency that the heavenly light, which is necessary to the salvation of all, is yet withholden from them. — And a third class, whose minds are of a stronger and hardier cast, but who have not been the subjects of any strong religious impressions, will be prone to infer that they may easily submit to forego what no efforts of theirs can secure, and thus recklessly give themselves up to a hardened indifference to all religion. So that the natural, if not the necessary, effect of a belief in the doctrine of a supernatural influence, as a prerequisite to salvation, as it operates upon different minds, will be spiritual pride, or spiritual gloom, or spiritual indifference. A doctrine, whose tendency is like this, should not be easily received as coming from God.

For these reasons, then, which, in the conclusion of this chapter, we shall comprise in a brief summary, we feel ourselves compelled to reject the prevailing doctrine, that the Divine Influence is supernaturally imparted to the minds of men.

First. — Those, who believe themselves to be the subjects of this supernatural illumination, have not in their own minds, and cannot afford to others, any sufficient evidence of the fact.

Second. — Many persons, who give the highest Scriptural proof of their being moved by a Divine Influence, are yet conscious of no such supernatural impression on their minds.

Third. — This supernatural illumination is claimed by persons who hold extremely various and even opposite opinions concerning Divine truth, but who have yet equal claims to be believed. Does it, then, belong to both? — if not, to which?

Fourth. — The kind of aid in question is opposed to all the analogies of God's moral government; since it is represented as operating independently of the agency of means or second causes.

Fifth. — The doctrine implies that an uncalled for and gratuitous use of Divine power is made; since, in the formation of our minds, provision is made for a Divine access to them, in countless ways.

Sixth. — It renders comparatively unimportant or useless the ordinary means of religious improvement.

Seventh. — The effects, which are relied upon

as evidences of this Divine illumination, may all be accounted for without resorting to this hypothesis. They are all resolvable into natural effects of natural causes.

Eighth. — The doctrine is unsupported by any sufficient authority in Scripture.

Ninth. — Its tendencies and frequent effects upon the characters, both of those who do, and of those who do not, receive it, are such as render the Divine origin of the doctrine very questionable.

CHAPTER IX.

Divine Influence not "Specially" imparted.

DISMISSING now the doctrine of the supernatural character of the Divine Influence, as it operates upon the human soul, we are obliged to pursue, a little further, the unwelcome duty, for so it is, of showing what we consider to be the mistakes that prevail on this subject; — and next observe, that there is no sufficient reason for believing that this influence is "*specially*" communicated, in the modern, or "revival sense," of the word. The terms *Supernatural* or *Miraculous*, used in this connexion, have been, as we have already suggested, for reasons not distinctly avowed, laid aside by some of the more recent and able writers on this subject, though the

thought is still contained, or implied, in the general tenor of their language, and in many of the authorized formularies of that faith to which they still professedly adhere. We feel justified in making this remark; for if they who use the term "special" and those analogous to it, in reference to this subject, would accurately define the ideas attached to these terms, they would find, that, in removing from them every thing that is strictly miraculous, much, if not all, that is distinctive in them, as applied to spiritual influence, would be taken away.

What, then, is intended to be conveyed by the term "special," as thus used. Are we referred for the meaning to the *effects* of the spirit, in what are called, in these modern times, "revivals" of religion? This is commonly done. We are directed, with a decisive and triumphant air, by those who use the phrase, and advocate the doctrine, whatever it may be that is denoted by it, to the alleged effects of the holy spirit as manifested in these seasons of excitement, as being decisive evidences of their "special" character. They "would as soon doubt," they tell us, "of their own existence, as that these effects proceeded from this influence." But what effects? All? By no means. None, certainly, but those which are "genuine." But which are genuine? Here there is no criterion. The test fails, precisely where its discriminative power is needed. Edwards, the great authority, says, that, in these times of excitement, there are *no* "unerring signs" of "gracious affections," that is, of those

which are caused by the "special" agency of the spirit. Stoddard, a great "Revivalist" in his day, as quoted by Edwards, observes, "All visible signs are common to converted and unconverted men; and a relation of experiences, among the rest." And, of more than twenty modern divines, all leading authorities on this point, whose letters are appended to Dr. Sprague's "Lectures on Revivals of Religion," and all of whom believe, with an undoubting confidence, that these revivals are the work of the "special" influence of the spirit, none pretend to be wiser than their great hierarch, Edwards, on this subject; but all coincide, in a strong, sensible, and edifying manner, in denouncing the mistakes, delusions, excesses, and counterfeit conversions, which usually prevail at such times. They unite, with one voice, in declaring that the fairest and most promising appearances, in these seasons of excitement, are always liable to be delusive. What, then, is the value of this test of *fact* or *experience* in ascertaining the true nature of the "special" influences of the spirit? We are directed to certain results in a "genuine" revival. But what revival is genuine, none, at *the time*, pretend to decide; and we are thus carried back to that point in the inquiry, from which we originally started. And if it be to the *remote* effects of "revivals," as manifested in a good and holy life, to which we are referred, in proof of their genuineness, as is the fact; * then we as-

* See the very judicious Essay of Dr. Woods, prefixed to the "Lectures" above mentioned.

sert, that it is impossible for any one inferior to the Omniscient Being Himself, to determine, amidst the countless moral influences which are continually operating upon the character, what part of this good and holy life is to be ascribed to the efficacy of this alleged "special" influence of the spirit of God in the season of such a religious excitement. In this point of view, also, the criterion is vague and unsatisfactory.

What, then, we are constrained to inquire, is meant by the term "special," as applied to the influences of the spirit? Is it meant that these influences are experienced at certain times and places, *more* than at others, without bringing into view the precise nature of these influences, as supernatural or not? * If this be all, we have no difficulty in admitting the fact; though we object wholly to the propriety of the term "special," as thus applied. Undoubtedly there are seasons, when the minds of individuals are more

* By many of the definitions which are given of "revivals," as they are called, this is all that is conveyed. We quote one from many in the "Letters" before referred to. It is that by Dr. Wayland. - "By revivals of religion, I mean," says he, "special seasons in which the minds of men, within a certain district, or in a certain congregation, are more than usually susceptible of impression from the exhibition of moral truth." p. 236. Waiving the logical inaccuracy and the confusion of thought which are involved in thus making a revival "a season or time merely, instead of an agency, or act, or result, which we suppose was meant, we have no objection to this definition, and most earnestly desire that such revivals may be very frequent in all our churches.

open to religious impressions, and more deeply penetrated with a sense of religious responsibility, than at others; and it is true, also, that this state of mind is often extended, by sympathy, and the skilful use of well known means, to communities. But there is nothing which can properly be called "special" in this agency of God upon the human mind. This is only that "common" or "ordinary" influence, which, by Edwards, and all subsequent writers of the same common stamp, is distinguished from that "saving" operation which is vouchsafed to the "saints."

We are thus obliged to seek, yet further, for the true import of the term "special," as applied to Divine Influence. And the only remaining signification, that we can gather from the writings of those who have thus appropriated the word, is, — that it denotes a Divine Influence imparted at certain times and places, and to certain individuals or bodies of men, *while it is withheld from others*. It is this latter circumstance, particularly, which renders this communication of Divine Influence "special," where it is said to be made. In conformity with this idea, such unscriptural expressions as "clouds of mercy," and "showers of grace," are used to denote that certain districts and small portions of the earth are peculiarly visited by God's gracious presence; and "seasons of refreshing" are spoken of, as periods when an extraordinary "effusion" of Divine love is "poured out."

1. Our first remark on this doctrine is, that it is unscriptural. It has not any direct support

in the Bible; and it is opposed to all the leading and plainly declared truths respecting the character and government of God, which the Bible does contain. Both these positions we shall endeavour to establish in as few words as possible.

In regard to the first point, namely, that the doctrine in question is unwarranted by Scripture, we refer, in proof, to what has already been urged on the total want of Scriptural evidence of the *supernatural* communication of a Divine Influence. The argument is the same in both cases. The alleged "special" influence communicated to numbers of persons, both under the Old and New Dispensation, was strictly miraculous; and there is not merely no proof that this miraculous agency was extended to any age subsequent to that of the Apostles and that of their immediate followers, but the peculiar circumstances of the case, as we have already shown, *limited* this agency to them.

But, in the next place, the doctrine is directly opposed to what the Scriptures *do* declare respecting the character and government of God. We need not fill our pages with quotations familiar to all. It will be admitted that we are taught in God's Revealed Word, in a vast variety of phraseology, and in very numerous statements and examples, that our Heavenly Father is equally good to all, in all times, and in all places. But this cannot be true, if He is "specially" good to some, at certain particular times and places. The Scriptures teach that His mercy is from

everlasting to everlasting, equally extending to all generations of men. But this is not to be reconciled with the fact, that this mercy is sometimes vouchsafed, and sometimes withholden. The Scriptures teach that in God there is no variable-ness or shadow of change. But this cannot be so, if He smiles to-day, and frowns to-morrow ; or if, in respect to this or that little spot of earth, He now gives, and now withhold, expressions of His Divine regard. The Scriptures teach that He is the common Father and Friend of all His creatures ; and that, as the fountain, so the stream, of His paternal love is ever flowing and ever full, and ever open to the faithful and earnest inquirer. But how is this to be reconciled with the fact, that He chooses certain individuals, or certain communities, at certain specified periods, as the "special" objects of His pardon and beneficence ; while, meantime, all the rest of His human family are not thus graciously visited, but are, for this period at least, excluded from a participation of the favor ? The Scriptures teach, as the words of the Saviour himself, that God will "give His holy spirit to them that ask Him." But can this be true, if, in point of fact, He will give it only to certain individuals, at certain times and places, whether it is asked or not ? It seems to us that these statements of Scripture, and the doctrine in question, cannot both stand together. One must give place. And we cheerfully leave it to the candid and serious inquirer to determine which it shall be.

2. Our next objection to the doctrine in

question is, that it is derogatory to all just and elevated views of the character of God. It represents Him, not as a Being of uniform and unchangeable goodness, but as inconstant and capricious in the bestowment of His favors; not as the everlasting and ever present Father and Friend of all His creatures, but as partial in the allotment of His goodness, equally in regard to person, place, and time. We do not assert, and we are happy not to think, that this is intended by the more intelligent of those who advocate and press the doctrine. But it is, we apprehend, the necessary inference from it; and it is, in point of fact, the impression which is generally received from it.

What should we think, then, of a father of a numerous family, who should, at some particular time, and on grounds of preference known only to himself, select from his children one or two individuals, inhabiting some favored spot, as the objects of his "special" favor, and "pass by" all the rest, with only an ordinary expression of good-will; and this, too, without any especial merit on the part of the favored ones, and while all the rest equally desired, and equally sought, and equally labored for, and, so far as conduct is concerned, equally *deserved*, these special tokens of his love? Would not this be justly deemed an instance of favoritism? Would it not be considered essentially partial and unjust? But how does it differ from the case before us?

The "special" and peculiar presence of God,

in saving the souls of men, is said to be manifested in a certain place, and in the midst of a certain community. That place and that community are considered as being extraordinarily favored. Here it is, that, for the time, the "clouds of mercy" are said to gather. Here it is, that, for the time, the "showers of grace" are said to descend. Here it is, that, for the time, the "effusion of the Spirit" is said to be poured out. An allusion, and, as it seems to us, an ignorant, or, at least, a scarcely reverent allusion, is made to the day of Pentecost, as if the age of miracles had not passed away, and as if there was the slightest similarity in the circumstances of the two events. The spirit of God is said to come down "like a mighty, a rushing, mighty wind." Thanks are offered for this "special season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." This is declared to be the "accepted" time, and, it may be, the only accepted time, for repentance, at that particular period and place. There must be no delay, no, not for an instant, in taking advantage of this propitious season, lest it pass away, never, never to return, and the sinner then and there be left to hopeless despair. Tidings of its approach and progress are spread over the broad land. It is announced from pulpit to pulpit. It is recognised by thousands of sympathizing spirits in prayer. Newspapers and tracts take up the intelligence, and send it into every nook and corner of the country. Its heralds are found in the village, and in the town; at the corners of the

streets, and around the domestic hearth. Minute chronicles are kept of its duration and results. Individual cases of what are thought to be proofs of its presence are given with a minute and offensive particularity. Those strugglings of the soul with itself, which instinctively shun all public observation, are brought into open day, and exposed to the common gaze. The first alarm; the subsequent gloom; the raging of the yet unsanctified passions; the wrestling, as it is irreverently called, of the yet unsubdued spirit with Almighty God; the sinking energies and last throbbings of the spent and passive soul; — and then the upward series, of the glimmering hope; the brightening joy; the decisive change; and finally, the rapturous, and, may we not say? the presumptuous, confidence of pardon sealed, and heaven secured; — all these are recorded, sent abroad, and learned by rote, as examples of the "special" influences of the spirit of God. But wherefore is it that this particular spot is thus made, for the time, the resting-place of the ark of safety? None can tell. The blessed boon may have been sought and toiled and prayed for, by these very individuals, years before, but in vain. What becomes of the other tens of thousands of communities of Christians, who are not thus "specially" visited, even of those, too, who sympathize in the same belief, and are divided, it may be, by a merely arbitrary line of township or parish from the favored one? They are left out of that circle to which the "special" blessing of God is confined. And wherefore? None

can tell. They have sought and toiled and prayed with equal faith and earnestness with those who enjoy the peculiar favor; but it is in vain. They are still left barren, and unrefreshed by these "showers of grace."

Now, how does this differ from the case we have supposed, of a father selecting a portion of his children, at some particular time and place, as the peculiar objects of his love and care, while all the rest are "passed by" with only an ordinary expression of his good-will? And, if this would be considered an instance of favoritism, partiality, and injustice, in the earthly parent, can we avoid a similar inference, shocking as it is, in regard to our Heavenly Father?

3. Again; the doctrine in question seems to us to destroy, or greatly to impair, the force of that fundamental truth of our religion, that the whole of this life, wheresoever passed, is a season of probation. Probation means trial. And in the very idea of trial is implied the opportunity of succeeding in our efforts. But, according to the doctrine under remark, the opportunity of success is narrowed down to a very short and very uncertain period, granted we know not how or why, and one which, unimproved, may never occur again. This is obviously opposed to the whole tenor of the Scriptures. We are there taught that the whole of our conscious and rational life, in this world, is "probation's day"; — that God's gracious promises are open to us while this day lasts; that it is never too early to seek His mercy, and it is never too late to despair of obtaining it.

4. And in respect to the practical effects of the doctrine upon those who are not the subjects of this "special" grace, — must they not be deplorable? Will it not be the reasoning of many, that, where the chances of success are so few, both in regard to time and place, it will be hardly worth while to enter on the hard discipline, which can alone place them among the candidates for obtaining it? Is it not a fact, too, that, in those places which are thought to have been visited by this "special" presence of the spirit, there are many, who, not having been the subjects of the requisite excitement, are left in wretchedness and despair, as if for them the "accepted time" were past? And are there not many, also, who by the same thought are driven to indifference, to recklessness, and to utter disregard of all religion?

And now will it be said that these remarks proceed on a mistaken view of the doctrine? Will it be pretended that all that is meant to be asserted by it is, that there are certain seasons, conjunctures, places, and circumstances, which are eminently and peculiarly fitted to impress and awaken the sinner? We reply, that, if this were all, we should have spared ourselves and our readers the trouble of remarking on a truth so plain and undisputed. But this is *not* all. The language in which the doctrine is stated and urged does not *admit* of this construction. This language, further, is not *intended* to convey this impression; and what is decisive on this point is, that the impression which is in reality

conveyed by it, and is known, by those who use it, to be *received* from it, is different from, and irreconcilable with, this explanation of the doctrine. It is said, in so many words, that God's spirit is "specially" and peculiarly "poured out upon" certain places and persons, at certain times. Its approach, its continuance, its effects, and its departure, are, as we have said, accurately described. The most earnest and vehement entreaties, exhortations, and appeals, are used to induce men to avail themselves of it. They are told, that it is a "special season of grace," that there is a "peculiar outpouring" of the spirit, which, if neglected, may never occur again. And the horrible ingratitude, and the still more horrible consequences, of disregarding this "special manifestation" of the spirit, are denounced in the most fearful and tremendous terms. And will any say, that all that is meant by this is, that certain circumstances, and certain periods, are better fitted than others to produce religious impressions? *Can* any say this?

CHAPTER X.

Divine Influence not, in itself, Distinguishable.

III. Our next general remark, on the manner in which the influences of the spirit are mani-

tested, is, that they are not, in themselves, *distinguishable* from the ordinary operations of the human mind.

1. And, in illustration of this, we first observe, that to assert that they are thus distinguishable, is to assert that a miracle is wrought, as often as the Divine spirit is thus manifested. And this appears from the fact, that in ordinary states of the mind it is influenced, as we have had, repeatedly, occasion to remark, by thoughts, feelings, and emotions, of whose origin, vividness, and intensity, we are ignorant; and which, in consequence, are liable to be altered, in their nature, degree, and efficacy, without our being conscious, at the time, of the agent or agency. This is as true of the religious states or "frames" of the mind, as of those which exist in reference to any other subject. This, we say, is naturally and ordinarily the fact. And hence it follows, that, if the operations of a Divine Influence upon the mind be distinguishable, as such, from its ordinary movements, as it is acted upon by the countless influences to which it is subjected, its well-known and established laws are invaded. It is properly and literally a miracle, just as much as if any of the well-known natural and ordinary laws of the material world were suspended, or altered, or broken. Now does any body believe, that, in all those cases in which the Divine spirit operates upon the souls of men, a miracle is performed? And yet, obviously, this is asserted, just as often as it is asserted that the operations of the spirit upon the mind are to be distin-

guished, as Divine, from its ordinary modes of operation. Here, then, is one difficulty with which the system under remark is attended. It goes the full length, as we have had occasion to remark in reference to another point, of taking us out of the ordinary dispensation of Providence, under which we live, and of placing us under a miraculous one. "The agency of the spirit in our souls," says Paley,* "*distinctly perceived*, is properly a miracle. Now miracles are instruments in the hand of God, of signal and extraordinary effects, produced upon signal and extraordinary occasions. Neither internally, nor externally, do they form the ordinary course of his proceeding with his reasonable creatures." If, then, the accompanying of these Divine influences with a distinguishing mark of their heavenly origin does in fact endow them with a supernatural character, it is plain that the doctrine in question is exposed to all those objections which have already, at so much length, been urged against this hypothesis. And with this single remark we might dismiss it.

But the subject is very important, and it may be, therefore, proper to show, briefly, that most of the arguments, which have been adduced against the miraculous manifestations of a Divine Influence in the human mind, lie equally against those which are said to be in themselves distinguishable as Divine.

* See Sermon **xxix.**, where this argument is more fully elaborated.

2. Thus it is obvious that the same argument from experience may be urged, which we have already brought to bear upon the doctrine of an influence supernaturally imparted. Men, who give every Scriptural proof of being moved by the spirit of God in their lives, namely, "goodness, righteousness, and truth," nevertheless declare that they are incapable of distinguishing the suggestions of the spirit from the operations of their own minds. Instances of this kind have fallen under the observation of most persons of mature years. Even Edwards virtually confesses, or implies, that he was moved by the spirit without, at the time, knowing it. After speaking of the first instance "of that sort of sweet inward delight in God and divine things that he had lived much in since," he says, — "But it never came into my thought, that there was any thing spiritual, or of a saving nature, in this," though he, evidently, afterwards thought there was.

3. It is equally obvious, that persons not unfrequently assert that they can thus distinguish the movements of God's spirit within, whose lives are wholly wanting in this Scriptural evidence of the fact. Which, then, is to be believed? And, in addition to this, we often observe those who equally claim to be able thus to distinguish spiritual influences by a specific mark, and *have equal claims to be believed*, arrive at entirely opposite and irreconcilable results respecting the most important doctrines of religion. Is, then, this Divine and distinguishable light offered, to lead men in different directions?

4. The supposition, further, that the effect of God's agency upon the human mind should be marked by an *express* token of His presence, is contrary to all the analogies of His natural and moral providence. In all other cases, we see the operations of a Divine agency only in its results. We are happy to quote again a luminous statement of Paley. It is quite in point. "We distinguish not between the acts of God and the course of nature. It is so with His Spirit. When, therefore, we teach that good men may be led, or bad men converted, by the Spirit of God, and yet they themselves not distinguish His holy influence; we teach no more than what is conformable, as I think has been shown, to the frame of the human mind, or rather to our degree of acquaintance with that frame; and also analogous to the exercise of Divine power in other things; and also necessary to be so; unless it should have pleased God to put us under a quite different dispensation, that is, under a dispensation of constant miracles. I do not apprehend that the doctrine of spiritual influence carries the agency of the Deity much farther than the doctrine of providence carries it; or, however, than the doctrine of prayer carries it. For all prayer supposes the Deity to be intimate with our minds." *

5. We have said that the position now before us involves a miraculous agency. We now press this point one step further, and observe, that it implies the performance of a miracle without any

* Sermon XXIX.

adequate call or occasion for one. Provision is made, in that part of our mental constitution to which we have had frequent occasion to advert, by which new ideas may be suggested, clearer views of Divine truth afforded, greater intensity imparted to our emotions and passions, without our being at the time conscious of the producing cause. And as we do not know what that cause or order is, in which ideas and emotions are communicated, so, it is plain, this cause or order may be altered, or departed from, broken in upon, and arranged, to suit the purposes of Infinite Wisdom, without the separate knowledge or consciousness, on our part, of the heavenly interposition. Is it reasonable, then, to think that the miracles, implied in accompanying the influences of the spirit of God upon the human mind by some distinguishing and palpable tokens of the fact, should thus be causelessly and gratuitously wrought?

6. Another objection to the doctrine, that the influences of the spirit are distinguishable, is, that it is nowhere promised, nowhere asserted, in the Scriptures, that these influences should be thus distinguishable from the natural operations of the human mind. Now, if this doctrine were true, it is, beyond question, extremely important. It is fraught, moreover, with consequences, as we shall presently see, truly tremendous. And if it be thus true, and thus important, is it conceivable, that it should not have been stated or referred to in the Scriptures? Yet it is not. The influence of the spirit is promised. The means of bring-

ing one's self within the sphere of its agency are pointed out. Its effects upon the character are described. But these writings do not contain any intimation that this influence, in times subsequent to the Apostolic age, should be, in itself, so characterized, so marked, so authenticated by a divine stamp, as to be distinguished from the other phenomena of the mind of man.

7. But this is the feeblest part of the objection to the doctrine before us, derived from Scripture. It is not only not stated that the influences of the spirit are distinguishable, but, further, it is distinctly stated, and by our Lord himself, that they are *not* distinguishable. In his memorable conversation with Nicodemus, where Divine influences are directly spoken of, he compares them to the viewless wind. "This," said he, "bloweth where it listeth; and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth; so is every man that is born of the spirit." That is, in effect, a great and essential change is produced. It is the work of the spirit of God upon the mind. But how, or in what particular manner it is wrought, we know no more than the rules which govern the changes of the atmosphere. The effect we know. The manner of its production, and the mode of its operation, we know not. The doctrine before us, then, is not only without support in the Scriptures, but it stands directly opposed to the express language of Jesus Christ himself.

8. We have one more objection to the hypothesis that the influence of the holy spirit is dis-

tinguishable, which, taken in connexion with what has already been offered, seems to us to put the question at rest. We refer to the natural and necessary effects of the doctrine. These, when carried out into their legitimate consequences, are appalling. He who believes that he is under the especial influences of the spirit of God, and that he can distinguish these from the ordinary operations of his own mind, will, of necessity, feel bound to obey this superior guidance, at all hazards. He is thus, in his own belief, taken out of the moral dispensation under which common mortals live, and placed under a miraculous, or, at any rate, an extraordinary and peculiar one. The restraints of law, social order, and common sense; the rules of fitness, prudence, and propriety; the natural obligations of rectitude; and the inborn suggestions of the human heart,—what are all these to him? They are little or nothing worth. He believes himself to be guided by a better light and a stronger law, even a light and law which have emanated directly from God himself, and which bear His express signature and sanction. And what is this but the grossest fanaticism? What is it but a religious phrensy? What is fanaticism, and what is phrensy, but the disavowal of our rational faculties, and the surrendry of ourselves to any internal suggestions and impulses, which are believed to be of a higher authority than they? True, these errors do not always run into those shocking extremes which we sometimes witness, and which are multiplied around us in periods of

high religious excitement. But the reason is, they are modified and controlled by external restraints, and by that partial influence which the rational powers are, even then, permitted to exert. But their tendency is ever to excess; and the system, fairly carried out, naturally results in excess. And, admitting the soundness of the principle which is avowedly acted upon, those persons act most consistently and consequentially, who most thoroughly and decidedly put all the restraints of reason and common sense at defiance, when these interfere with the divinely marked light from heaven. That these results do often follow from the practical admission of the principle we oppose, is a matter of fact; plain, palpable, every-day, downright fact. It has been, and is, one great source of those lamentable excesses which are perpetrated under the name of "revivals of religion"; and which good men, even of that class of Christians who favor them, are, at length, with late, but most praiseworthy wisdom, uniting to discountenance. And can it be believed that a doctrine, which naturally leads to such results as these, is a doctrine of the Scriptures? Are its results identical with those which are therein said to be the fruits of the true spirit of God, namely, "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance"?

9. And now what is there to be opposed to this mass of objections, thus derived from reason, experience, and Scripture? They plainly throw the burden of proof upon the advocates of this

doctrine. And when we ask for this proof, we find, that, as in the former case, it amounts to nothing more than the simple persuasion of the individual, that he is the subject of influences which are thus distinguishable from the ordinary operations of his own mind, that is, as we have shown, of supernatural influences. But can he himself be assured, beyond a reasonable doubt, that he is not, in this strong persuasion of his, laboring under a strong delusion? We think not. He will not pretend to essay the proof which the Saviour and his Apostles gave, and which alone is decisive of the presence of supernatural *power* in the mind, namely, supernatural *works*. What assurance can he have of the fact, which ought to satisfy a reasonable man, when all his reasoning powers are confessedly suspended, and made to lie in abeyance, by that very persuasion, whose truth and reality are the precise subjects in question? What criterion has he,—and this is the great point,—what *criterion* has he, by which he can thus distinguish the influences of the spirit of God, from the movements of his mind, as it is wrought upon, excited, disturbed, and put off its balance, by nervous excitement, by sickness, by despondency, by an irresistible machinery of external means, or by those unknown causes, which are continually altering its temper and tone? He has, certainly, no satisfactory criterion, which he can make known to other minds; and he has none, as we believe, which ought to satisfy himself. He has nothing but a strong, and, we are willing to admit, a sincere belief, as has

been already stated, on which to rely. And this, as we trust we have shown in regard to an avowed supernatural influence, is at war with established principles of the human intellect; is opposed to experience; is irreconcilable with the known laws of God's moral government; is not promised in the Scriptures; is irreconcilable with the plain declarations by our Saviour himself; leads to the excesses of fanaticism; and is one which may be easily accounted for on natural principles, without supposing any interposition of the spirit at all. And is a mere bald persuasion like this, to be regarded or relied upon? Is it one, to which a man, in the possession of his right reason, ought to pay the least respect?

It has, in truth, been long since repudiated by the better class of thinkers, of many different sects of Christians; by Locke, Fenelon,* Paley,

* The authority of F  nelon will, in an especial manner, be deemed important by those who may differ from us on this point, since his views of the "interior life" have exposed him to the charge of mysticism on this subject. His language, particularly in his "*Lettres Spirituelles*," is very explicit and decisive on the subject before us, and fully sustains the reasoning in the text. The Letter, for example, to the Duke de Chevreuse is devoted entirely to the impossibility of distinguishing the operations of God, *in themselves considered*, on the human soul, from its natural movements. And he not only asserts the fact, but proceeds to show the final causes of this arrangement in that moral providence under which we are placed. We take leave to quote a single passage in illustration of this.

"Nous ne saurions avoir de r  gle pr  cise et certaine l  -

Priestley ; and, in more modern times, by the author of the " Natural History of Enthusiasm," by Archbishop Whately, by the more intelligent Calvinistic writers, and by all those who believe in the strict unity of God ; and it only remains that it should be rooted out of the minds of enthusiasts and fanatics of all sects.

CHAPTER XI.

Divine Influence not Arbitrarily imparted ; and not Irresistible in its Effects. — Conclusion of this Part of the Subject.

IV. OUR next general remark has reference to another wide-spread and very generally adopted

dessus au-dedans de nous-mêmes. Nous avons seulement la règle extérieure de nos actions, qui est la conformité aux préceptes, aux conseils, aux bienséances chrétiennes. Si nous avions de plus au-dedans une règle pour discerner avec certitude le principe surnaturel d'avec celui de la nature, nous aurions une certitude de notre sainteté et une infaillibilité pour nous conduire nous-mêmes par inspiration. C'est ce qui est précisément contraire à l'obscurité de la vie de foi, à l'incertitude du pèlerinage, et à la dépendance où nous devons être ici à l'égard de nos supérieurs. Nous ne devons donc point chercher ce que l'état présent ne nous permet pas de trouver ; je veux dire cette règle certaine pour discerner les mouvemens de la grâce d'avec ceux de la nature, qui peuvent imiter la grâce même." — *Œuvres*, Tome 5e. Lettre V. 8vo. Paris. 1826. See also Lettre CXIII. in the same volume.

mistake concerning the manner in which the influence of the spirit is imparted. It is, that this aid is not *arbitrarily* given to a few individuals. We have already adverted to a kindred doctrine, namely, that this influence is "special-ly" vouchsafed to certain communities, at certain times and places, without any known or assignable cause of preference. But what we now assert is, that it is not given to a few individuals, by an act of Divine sovereignty, who are predestinated unto everlasting life, and this, too, in a perfectly arbitrary manner, and not on account of any thing foreseen in them, and still less on account of any thing they have, or are, or can do, without it; but while they are, by the system, of which this doctrine is a component and necessary part, naturally and necessarily, in a state of irremediable sinfulness and spiritual death.

We must make a brief and rapid allusion to this doctrine, since it still holds its place in those Creeds and Confessions of Faith which profess to be Calvinistic. It is even found in those of Theological Institutions, some of whose Professors place themselves in the very unenviable predicament, of solemnly affirming, either at their entrance into office, or at regular periods afterwards, their belief in the doctrine, either "for substance," or with some other mental reservation; but are occasionally found employed in the intervals, as if conscience-stricken for the sin, in neutralizing or in attempting to explain away the obvious meaning of what they thus solemnly affirm in words.

We reject it, then, totally, and in all its separate parts. We believe it to be unsound at its very core, and fatally diseased in all its ramifications. It takes its origin in error, and runs into the most palpable and shocking absurdities. It presents a view of God, of His government, of the condition and prospects of man, which is utterly irreconcilable with all that God has taught us of Himself, as the common Father and Friend of His creatures; irreconcilable with the whole idea of this present life being a state of probation; irreconcilable with all the injunctions of the Gospel to repent and reform, since, by the very statement of the doctrine, it is put out of our power to do so; and it is irreconcilable with the sincerity of all the exhortations, promises, and motives, which are held forth in the Scriptures as inducements to a holy life, because none but a few favorites of the Deity, chosen no one knows how or why, can receive that Divine Influence, which will enable them to comply with these exhortations, to listen to these promises, and to yield to these motives. It seems to us, moreover, that the express language of the Saviour stands in direct opposition to this view of the subject; and that if he enforces any thing in respect to it with peculiar emphasis, it is, that the spirit of God is promised to all sincere and earnest efforts of all men, everywhere, in all times, under the dispensation of the Gospel. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, much more shall your Heavenly Father give the holy spirit to them that ask Him."

This, if it stood alone, would be decisive of the question before us; but it is, in substance, repeated and recognised throughout the New Testament. And nothing is clearer to our minds, than that the aids of the spirit are not arbitrarily given to a few, nor given irrespectively of their character and claims, and confined to them; but are freely offered to all, who will seek them in the way of God's appointment. His impartiality and equal goodness are made known, not in giving equal degrees of his spiritual aid to all, or special degrees of it to any, without reference to their moral desert; but by granting it to all, in exact proportion to the use they make of what has been already vouchsafed. In fine, we dismiss the doctrine by observing, that it is one which is dishonorable to the character of God; at war with the whole tenor of the Scriptures, considered as a rule of life; absurd in itself; injurious in its effects upon man; and one, which, having had its origin in a dark age, it is now quite time the world had passed by, and left among forgotten things.

V. We congratulate our readers and ourselves, in having gotten almost through the examination of those mistakes in respect to the manifestations of the spirit, in which the doctrine has been involved. There is one remaining, which we deem of sufficient consequence to notice. It is said that this divine aid, in its effects upon the sinner's soul, is *irresistible*; that it performs an unaided work, which we can neither forward nor retard,

help nor oppose ; that it is effectual with those to whom it is afforded, and renders their safety certain ; while, to those who receive it not, salvation is for ever denied.

We shall enter into no detailed examination of this doctrine. It is too naked and obvious an error to detain us long. It is plain, if this influence of the spirit be irresistible in its effects, that man is no longer free to choose ; and if he be not free to choose, he is not a free agent ; and if he be not a free agent, he is not accountable for his conduct ; and if he be not accountable for his conduct, it is a mockery to speak of this life as a state of trial, or of the future life as a state of retribution. And what more triumphant plea can the sinner want than this ? If, again, man is entirely passive in the reception of this Divine aid, which is likewise said to be essential to his salvation, what a mockery also are all the precepts, the exhortations, of the Gospel ; and all the motives and means of moral and religious improvement which it suggests ! And again, what mean such texts as this, "Grieve not the spirit of God," if the spirit of God be irresistible in its efficacy, and cannot, in consequence, be grieved ? What does St. Paul mean, when he speaks of those who have "done despite unto the spirit of grace" ; if this grace be irresistible, and can have, in consequence, no despite done unto it ? And how could the same Apostle speak of the grace of God not being, in his case, in vain, unless it could have been in vain ? And, to quote no further on this point, is it not implied throughout the whole Scriptures,

that, in whatsoever way the spirit of God operates, whether by suggestion of truths and motives, or in any other manner, its operations, in all cases, may be disregarded, and rendered of no effect, by the perverseness of sinful men? And if so, how can we listen, for a moment, to the assertion that the movements of the spirit are irresistible?

If, then, the influence of the holy spirit be not *supernaturally* manifested; if it be not *specialty* communicated at certain times and places, in the sense intended by them who favor those excitements called "revivals"; if it be not *distinguishable*, in its operations, from the ordinary movements of the human mind; if it be not *arbitrarily* imparted to some individuals, and withholden from others; and if, when imparted, it be not *irresistible* in its effects; — the question still recurs, What is the manner, in which it is communicated to the mind of man?

What we deem to be the proper answer to this inquiry has been continually implied in the whole train of our remarks. It requires, however, to be distinctly stated; since we would avoid the not uncommon error of admitting a doctrine in general terms, and then explaining it away in all its details and particular applications.

CHAPTER XII.

Laws of Operation.

WE believe, then, that the influence of God, designated in the Scriptures by the terms, "spirit," and "holy spirit," so far as they can be properly considered as having an application to Christians of all ages, *coöperates* with the natural powers of man in the *improvement* of his religious nature; — that no *new* principle, power, or capacity is thereby *added* to the human soul; but that it is manifested in developing, strengthening, maturing, and perfecting those which naturally belong to it; — that it does not operate necessarily, or ordinarily, by a sudden, violent, or marvellous change; but gradually and silently, by suggesting truth, by supplying motives, by enlightening the understanding, and by influencing the will; — that all this is effected in perfect congruity and entire consonance with the constitution of our moral and intellectual natures, and is made effectual, and can alone be made effectual, through the voluntary efforts of man. We believe that this presence of the spirit of God to the soul is *not confined* to a few favored spots, and vouchsafed at particular seasons, to the exclusion of all others; but is *equally offered* to all persons, in all places, and in all times. We believe that it is *not distinguishable*, in itself, as a separate and extraordinary influence; but, like the principle of animal life, is *known by its effects*, diffusing

warmth, sensibility, and power through our moral natures. We believe that it is not *arbitrarily* imparted, that is, without reference to human desert, either in respect to those who are the subjects of it, or the degree in which it is afforded; but that the rule, made known by our Saviour in regard to all other good endeavours, holds here, namely, "to him who hath," that is, well uses what he hath, "more shall be given, and he shall have abundantly." We believe that it acts with *no uncontrollable* power; but, like all the other benignant offers of God, it may be accepted or spurned, used or abused; and that, in the reception or rejection of it, there is no infringement of any kind, or in any degree, of man's power freely to choose and act. In a word, it comes to the human soul like the genial influence of the material sun to the embryo plant, creating nothing there, and adding nothing to its inherent properties; but warming, quickening, unfolding, calling into new life, maturing, and leading on to its appropriate and destined consummation, what was before concealed, dormant, or dead. And, if we may pursue the parallel a little further, we would say, that, like this influence of the material sun, the spiritual light and heat beam on all alike; that, like it too, it performs its gracious work, ordinarily, without violence, noiselessly, imperceptibly, and in perfect accordance with those laws which were, at first, impressed upon the human mind; and that, in fine, as, without this influence of the material sun, the plant remains inert and undistinguishable in the common earth,

so the soul, unquickened by the spiritual agency of the "Sun of Righteousness," is of the earth, earthy, and under this heavy load of its earthliness must lie hopelessly buried.

In regard to the precise mode in which the Divine Influence, or, to use here the simpler terms, God himself, acts upon the minds of His rational offspring, it is obviously a subject beyond the reach of our present faculties. It is one, moreover, concerning which it is very important that we should take counsel of our ignorance, and, to this end, that we should learn to understand how ignorant we are. We know that God is intimately and essentially and constantly present to every part of His creation, since, without this presence, it could not continue to exist for a single instant; and we know, further, that He usually operates on every part of His creation by means of general laws, for this is matter of constant observation, and that, without them, the business of life could not be carried on. "I believe," says Lord Bacon, "that, notwithstanding God hath rested and ceased from creating since the first Sabbath, yet, nevertheless, He doth accomplish and fulfil His divine will in all things, great and small, singular and general, as fully and exactly by providence, as He could by miracle and new creation, though His working be not immediate and direct, but by compass; not violating nature, which is His own law upon the creature."* And, further, as in respect to the

* Catechism of Faith.

inanimate world His providential care is directed by general laws, yet in a manner to be made capable of producing particular results; so in reference to the spiritual world, while He, in like manner, operates upon the mind by general laws, they are so ordered as to produce any particular results which the Divine Mind may direct, and the particular condition and exigencies of the recipient may require. But *how* God is thus present to His creation, and *how* facts or events are thus connected together, according to general laws, and made to produce results suited to the wants and aspirations of the human soul, we are, and, with our present faculties, must remain, in profound ignorance. He has thus said to the human intellect, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further." And he, who is duly aware of the limits which God has thus placed to the human faculties, and of the small achievements of these faculties in human knowledge, will not deem it strange that we remain unacquainted with the precise mode in which this Divine Influence is brought into contact with the human mind.

Of *efficient* causes, even in the world of matter, that is, of any *necessary* connexion between any two consecutive events, we know nothing. Laying out of the question those relations among abstract truths, the knowledge of which is emphatically called science, and which has, obviously, no connexion with the subject before us; all our philosophy, and all our knowledge of nature, are limited to what are sometimes called, by way of distinction, *physical* causes; that is, to the ascertaining

of certain conjunctions or successions of events ; and these facts or circumstances, more or less general, comprehending more or fewer particulars, we call *laws* of nature. And even of these laws, or generalized facts, we know but very little, compared with what remains to be known. We travel over the earth's surface, and dig through its outer shell, and give as intelligible a description as we can of what we have seen ; we arrange together those of its productions which seem to us to have some common resemblance or some common relationship ; we analyze things compounded into simpler elements ; we resolve particular appearances into appearances more common ; we refer strange phenomena to phenomena better known ; and, noting the succession of certain effects or results, we connect them together with a theory, sometimes true, and sometimes false, — and this we dignify with the name of Science and Philosophy. Meantime, as we have said, we know nothing of the *efficient* causes of any thing. We know nothing of that internal economy, on which the appearances we observe around us depend. Take the commonest thing that meets your observation, a breath of air, a pencil of light, a ray of heat, a drop of water, or the minutest particle of the earth ; and endeavour to ascertain its *essential* nature and relations, and you will find it contains that in it, which all the combined science of all time cannot explain, or even refer to the operation of any of those general laws

which are the only legitimate objects of a sound philosophy.*

And if this be true of the world around us, it is still more strikingly so, of that physical, moral, intellectual being, which each man calls himself. Our knowledge, indeed, of the wonderful machinery of these physical frames of ours, is said to be tolerably complete; but still they contain parts, of the design of which all the accumulated talent and labor of a distinct class of men, devoted to the subject, during many centuries, is yet obliged to confess its ignorance. It is not even pretended that we can know any thing of the nature of the mysterious principle of *life*, which makes our bodies to differ from the common mass of the earth and elements; or of that law or mode of operation, by which, through its instrumentality, our various organs are enabled to secrete and appropriate nourishment, and develop and beautify the human frame; or why it falters in its operations, or why it stops. We are equally ignorant of the principle of *sensation* or *nervous sensibility*, which seems to be super-added to that of life. We are quite as ignorant, again, of the *constitution of our minds*; how they

* "He who shall discover the true general law of the forces by which elements form compounds, will probably advance as far beyond the discoveries of Newton, as Newton went beyond Aristotle. But who shall say in what direction this new flight shall be, and what new views it shall open to us of the *manner* in which matter obeys the laws of the Creator?" — WHEWELL. *Bridge-water Treatise*.

are connected with the frail tenement they inhabit; how they receive impressions, through the medium of our senses, from the world without, and how, in turn, they operate upon material organs; how they think, feel, imagine, will, devise means to secure ends, "look before and after," are pervaded by moral sentiments and by a conviction of religious responsibility. The most we can know of all this is some few laws, according to which these operations are carried on. In fine, it must be confessed that we know very little of ourselves, so that with great truth it has been said, "One of the greatest mysteries to man is man." And all mature thinkers on this subject will, we suppose, accede to the conclusion of Locke, that "it will be idle for us, who know not how our own spirits move and act within us, to ask in what manner the spirit of God shall work upon us."*

And, further, if, in connexion with this train of thought, we recollect the exceeding imperfection of our knowledge of the Infinite God, we shall not be prepared to inquire very curiously into that precise mode by which He holds intercourse with the minds of men. If we cannot comprehend the nature of the humblest material thing, and know nothing of the efficient cause of its phenomena, or of the precise agency through which it operates on our minds, or our minds, in their reciprocal operation, upon that; what can we hope to understand of the nature and mode of

* Reasonableness of Christianity.

acting of the great Author of all? He is, obviously and necessarily, wholly incomprehensible to us, both in the degree of His perfections, and in the manner of His agency. We can have some idea of the *nature* of His attributes from similar qualities of our own souls. We know, too, by an infallible course of reasoning, or rather by an intuitive act of the mind, that they must be infinite in degree. But when we attempt to gain an accurate idea of them, our minds sink away from the effort, in amazement and utter helplessness, and, in the language of the Patriarch, we are ready to exclaim: — “Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? It is high as heaven; what canst thou do? — deeper than hell; what canst thou know?” Will any, then, with these thoughts before them, insist upon ascertaining the precise method in which God communicates His Divine Influence to the human soul? Is it not, plainly, a subject that lies beyond the reach of our present faculties?*

* “It is reasonable to suppose that the actings of spirit on spirit will be incomparably more refined, more exquisitely untraceable, than those which take place on corporeal substances; and yet how incomprehensibly minute and refined are the vital functions and changes in the smallest visible creatures! He who can maintain and renew all the complexities of the vital system, and the system of instincts, in successive generations of animalcules, can surely bring into the mind a thought seemingly inconsiderable in itself, which yet may be the sole original instrument of the temporal destinies of a kingdom, or the everlasting destinies of a soul.” — JOHN SHEPPARD, *Thoughts, &c.*

But still, in this, as in respect to all the other agencies of God in this lower world, there are some second, physical, or proximate causes, or, to speak more accurately, some general modes or laws of Divine operation, which do lie within the cognizance of our minds, and which it is allowable and proper to ascertain.

Thus we know, negatively, and it is a very important fact to know, that,—first, whatever these modes of operation are, they are vastly more extensive and varied than those in which men operate upon dead matter, and may be, and probably are, entirely different from them. In this, they can employ only the principles which already exist in the material universe. They can use only what before *was*. They can combine only what was prepared to their hands. But He *who made what we call nature*, can impart to it any new principles which He deems proper to effect his purposes. In all our reasonings on this subject, therefore, we should be guarded from confining the Divine operations, in the modes of their manifestation, to those narrow limits which restrict our own.

We know, yet further, that while He does thus exercise an influence upon human minds, it must be in a manner totally different from that by which He directs and governs mere material things. This is obvious; since, in whatever way our minds are thus illumined and guided by the Divine Mind, it must be in some manner that does not interfere with their free agency. We shall in vain seek, in the properties of material

affinity, attraction, and assimilation, an efficacy which will suggest motives, guide the will, and excite the aspirations of the immortal soul. It is hardly possible to conceive of a wider difference than must, of necessity, exist between those laws that govern the actions of voluntary agents, and the laws of mechanical force, by which the trains of material phenomena are regulated.

And, once more, we know, as a *general law* that governs the intercourse between the Divine and the human mind, that this Divine Influence, in the natural order of things, is not immediately and directly imparted, but through the *instrumentality of means and second causes*. In this respect we conceive the dispensations of our religion, as has been before intimated, are in perfect analogy with the dispensations of Providence. God's hand is to be recognised, as the operating cause, in all the events which take place around us; but, as a general rule, He effects nothing, as we have already had occasion to say, but by the intervention of subsidiary means. All events are connected in one grand series, or succession of results, which, according to their connexion with each other, we call effects and causes; and all coöperate together in producing the designs of the great First Cause. But there is no palpable manifestation of this cause. The work is done; the hand is unseen. God's spirit pervades creation, but it operates by no direct and palpable manifestation of itself. He maintains in being all that lives; not, however, by an immediate ministration of His care, but by

giving them organs, desires, wants, appropriate objects, and the means, appliances, and opportunities of using them. He provides us food, not immediately, but by that labor, which makes the earth "to yield her increase," by kindly attempering all the elements, and by all the gracious influences of the heavens. All the laws of the material universe are expressions of thought in the Divine Mind, but they are uttered in no audible language. God manifests Himself in all the aspects of nature, not by any express symbol, any palpable display of His glorious self, but by stamping beauty and grandeur on the whole, and by giving us eyes to see, and hearts to feel, and spirits to adore. In a similar manner, we apprehend, that is, by the intervention of second causes, He holds intercourse with, and pervades, the spirits of men; grants them all needed aid; furthers all their good efforts; and trains them up for a nearer intercourse with Him hereafter, and for ever. He offers to our minds the great truths and sanctions of religion, and disposes us, by an influence which seems to us to be a self-emanation, to receive them. And this, we must observe again, is effected by an indefinite variety of means. He is continually appealing to the religious principles and capacities of our natures, in the wonders of the external world; in the common course of Providence; in prosperity and in adversity; in success and in disappointment; in health and in sickness; in giving us objects of love, and in "changing their countenances and sending them away"; in opening new

sources of feeling in the heart, and in draining dry and sealing up the currents of affection. In a word, He is perfecting His will in us, by all the events and circumstances of nature, of His general providence, and of our particular lot and condition in life. His spirit is pleading with us, too, in all the consequences of our actions as moral agents; in the approval of conscience which follows good aims and good endeavours; and, still more emphatically, in that sense of degradation and guilt which follows every act of sin. This same spirit is addressing us, in an emphatic manner, throughout the sacred volume of His Word; in the history of the Jewish dispensation; in every recorded example of piety; in every encouragement to holiness; in every denunciation against iniquity; in every counsel of wisdom; in every rule of duty; in every prophecy; in every prayer; and, particularly and eminently, in the teaching, example, death, and resurrection of that blessed Saviour, to whom the spirit of God was given without measure; and in all the precepts, sanctions, institutions, and peculiar influences of his religion. It is thus, as we apprehend, that the promises of the Scriptures, in regard to this subject, are continually fulfilled from age to age. Thus it is, that "God worketh in men to will and to do; creating in them a new heart and a new spirit; opening their eyes, drawing, turning, renewing, strengthening them, and helping their infirmities."

"So manifold and various are the ways
Of restoration, fashioned to the steps

Of all infirmity, and tending all
To the same point, — attainable by all;
Peace in ourselves, and union with our God.” *

These views, as those who are conversant with the subject are aware, are stigmatized as narrow and low ; as belittling the efficacy of the holy spirit, in awakening, renovating, and sanctifying the sinner ; and as explaining away and rendering nugatory the doctrine. But we wish that those, who feel themselves authorized thus to speak, would inquire, whether the same objections do not lie, with equal force, against the whole providence of God ? Is it more worthy of Him to work without means than with ? How unworthy, then, are all the ordinary dispensations of His love to His creatures ! Is it more honorable to Him to operate by a direct impulse upon the souls of men, than to render the whole universe instinct with His informing, guiding, sanctifying spirit ? Which is the low and narrow doctrine, — that which teaches us to recognise God's holy spirit in all things ; or that which confines it, so far as man's religious advancement is concerned, to certain limited and specific, even though they be express and palpable, impulses ? And as to belittling His agency, which does this the more, — a doctrine which restricts this agency to some seemingly capricious and convulsive, even though they be obvious, manifestations of it, and those, too, which interfere with, and break in upon, the established course

* Excursion. Book iv.

of His natural and moral providence, — or one which leads us to perceive His spirit operating in all that exists, in every occurrence, in all beings, in all places,

“ Path, motive, guide, original, and end,”

hallowing all by its presence, conferring upon all a diviner meaning, and thus consecrating all to that great purpose, which pervades the whole creation, providence, and revealed will of God, — the development of the whole nature of man, his recovery and renovation from sin, and his sanctification to everlasting life ?

CHAPTER XIII.

Evidences of its Presence. — Conclusion.

THERE remains but one more important inquiry in regard to this subject. It is, What are the authentic *Evidences* of the presence and operation of Divine Influence on the soul ? With what proof ought we to be satisfied that God is, in reality, “ working within us to will and to do, of His good pleasure ? ”

In regard to this, there is, happily, little difference of opinion among judicious inquirers. It, in the first place, is a *holy life*. The language of President Edwards is very full and decisive on this point ; and in this he is followed by all the

more learned and sensible divines in modern times, who consider themselves as belonging to the same common denomination of Christians. To enforce this truth is the object of all the concluding part of his "Treatise on the Religious Affections," and it is by far the most able and useful part of the work. We shall quote a few passages as specimens of the whole train of remark.

After adverting, at great length, and with much acuteness and discrimination, to twelve distinct circumstances or phenomena in a religious experience, which are "*no* signs that affections are gracious," that is, are occasioned by the "*saving*" operations of the spirit; and, in like manner, to twelve more, by which "those affections that are spiritual and gracious do differ from those that are not so," he thus speaks of the last.

"But I am come now to the last distinguishing mark of holy affections" (that is, those caused by the "*saving*" operations of the spirit) "that I shall mention. Gracious and holy affections have their exercise and fruit in Christian practice. . . . I mean that they have that influence and power upon him who is the subject of them, that they cause that a practice, which is universally conformed to and directed by Christian rules, should be the practice and business of his life." — p. 332.

"Holy practice is as much the end of all that God does about his saints, as fruit is of all the husbandman does about his vineyard." — p. 347.

"Christ nowhere says, Ye shall know the tree by its leaves or flowers, or ye shall know men by

their talk, or ye shall know them by the good story they tell of their experiences, or ye shall know them by the manner and air of their speaking, and emphasis, and pathos of expression, or by speaking feelingly, or by making a very great show by abundance of talk, or by many tears and affectionate expressions, or by the affections ye feel in your hearts towards them; but, 'By their fruits shall ye know them.'" — p. 354.

"This [holy practice] is ten times more insisted on as a note of true piety, throughout the Scripture, from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelations, than any thing else. . . . But I can find no place, where either Christ or his Apostles do, in this manner, give signs of godliness, (though the places are many,) but where Christian practice is almost the only thing insisted on." — pp. 386, 387.

"Now from all that has been said, I think it to be abundantly manifest, that Christian practice is the most proper evidence of the gracious sincerity of professors, to themselves and others; and the chief of all the marks of grace, the sign of signs, and evidence of evidences, that which seals and crowns all other signs." — p. 394.

"There may be several good evidences that a tree is a fig-tree; but the highest and most proper evidence of it is, that it actually bears figs." — p. 395.

"Christian practice is the sign of signs, in this sense, that it is the great evidence, which confirms and crowns all other signs." — p. 395.

We add a short quotation from a sermon of Paley* to the same effect, and particularly on account of its practical character.

“The efficacy of the spirit is to be judged of by its fruits. Its immediate effects are upon the disposition. . . . Whenever, therefore, we find religious carelessness succeeded within us by religious seriousness; conscience, which was silent or unheard, now powerfully speaking and obeyed; . . . when we find the thoughts of the mind drawing or drawn more and more towards heavenly things; the value and interest of these expectations plainer to our view, a great deal more frequent than heretofore in our meditations, and more fully discerned; the care and safety of our souls rising gradually above concerns and anxieties about worldly affairs; when we find the force of temptation and of evil propensities, not extinct, but retreating before a sense of duty; self-government maintained; the interruptions of it immediately perceived, bitterly deplored, and soon recovered; sin rejected and repelled; . . . when we feel these things, then may we, without either enthusiasm or superstition, humbly believe that the spirit of God hath been at work in us.”

In this result, as we have already observed, the most judicious writers of the present day concur. But our appeal lies to a more decisive authority than all these, even to the Lord Jesus and his Apostles; and nothing can be more explicit than their language on this point. Thus, “He that

* Sermon “On the Influence of the Spirit.” Part III.

abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." And certainly it is to the friends of Jesus, if to any, that the holy spirit is given. "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin." "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." "For the fruit of the spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth."

These, then, are the authentic evidences that we are moved by the spirit of God. They are not strange, sudden, unaccountable, or miraculous. They do not require the sacrifice of our rational powers. They do not depend upon the fluctuation of the feelings, upon sympathy, heated appeals to the passions, or upon the excitements of crowds. They are seen in practice, quietly but effectually influencing the life, producing repentance, reformation, a growing conformity to God's will, a continually increasing purity, piety, and heavenly-mindedness. They are solid. They are durable. They have "the promise of the life that now is," and can alone prepare us for fuller manifestations of Divine favor in the eternal world.

And, as another proof of the reality of God's presence to the human soul, we add, in conclusion, that of Experience. We speak here of no mystical influence, but of one which is clear, distinct, rational, and matter of habitual consciousness with the truly pious spirit. It is a religious peace; a holy joy in God, in His Son,

and in the revelations of His will, that no words can adequately express. The soul, thus visited from on high, will perceive, that Christian truth is to all its capacities like light to the eye, each being made for the other; that the revelation of the Gospel is but the enlargement and confirmation of all other truth; that it interprets all the secrets of our mysterious nature; meets all its inner wants; answers to all its higher aspirations; solves all the dark problems of Providence; presents a noble aim to life; gives an all-concerning significance to human conduct; relieves the mind from the anguish of uncertainty respecting the future, from the distress of conflicting passions, from the solicitations of bad desire, from the opposition between duty and feeling, from the stings of remorse, and all the sad requitals of an outraged and hostile conscience. The spirit, thus touched of God, experiences what is emphatically called in the Scriptures a "joy in believing." It opens, continually, to new displays of His exhaustless love; perceives, more and more clearly, His stupendous plan of grace in the salvation of man; attains a blessed consciousness of thinking worthily and acting well; and gains more and more of that temper of our Divine Master, which elevates, tranquillizes, amends, and hallows the life. In every dark hour, its language will be, as it has been, "O what a power there is in the Infinite Mind of Deity, to communicate itself to the soul that looks singly to Him for comfort and support! The greater the exigence, the more perfect the adaptation; the

more troubled the sea is around us, the more we feel the security and firmness of our hold upon the Rock of Ages!" In a word, the spirit, thus guided from above, will experience, more and more, that the Saviour's parting promise of "peace" to his immediate disciples is not confined to them, but is fulfilled to his faithful followers now; that it is, indeed, "*his* peace"; that it is given, in very truth, "*not* as the world giveth"; that it adds to every token of Divine Beneficence some relishes of heavenly blessedness; makes the whole creation one august temple for praise; renders life one continued offering of love and homage; and clothes every event, even while it is "seen and temporal," with the sublimer wisdom of "things unseen and eternal."

We here take leave of this long protracted discussion. Why, are any ready to ask, has it been so long and earnestly pursued? Our answer has already virtually been given in the Introduction to this Essay. It is because every thing relating to the Influence of God upon the human soul is of ineffable importance;—because what we deem the truth in respect to it is the most cheering, sustaining, animating of all truths;—because, moreover, it is a subject that is peculiarly liable to misapprehension, perversion, and abuse;—and, because, in point of fact, it has been, and is, as we conceive, lamentably and shockingly mistaken, perverted, and abused. Therefore it is, that we have labored to give a Scriptural and rational account of it; to assert

and prove the doctrine as we believe our Lord and his disciples taught it; and, at the same time, to deny all license to dark bigotry, to wild enthusiasm, and to fanatical excess. We have hoped to do something, by which the sincere and earnest inquirer might be guided to true and useful results; to relieve the doctrine from errors and over-statements which have prevented its reception with some enlightened minds; — something to make the great truth felt, as well as admitted, — experienced, as well as acknowledged, — that God is near to the human soul, as nothing else is near, — and near with an all-controlling, all-penetrating, all-subduing power.

THE END.

